



hope and homes
for children

RCMD

in the role of the
“good adult”

SOCIAL WORK BY THE LAWS OF THE FAMILY SYSTEM

www.hopeandhomesbg.com

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FAMILY SYSTEM**

(RCMD IN THE ROLE OF THE “GOOD ADULT”)

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INTRODUCTION

Those working in child protection see parents and families at their worst. It is often difficult not to be judgmental and this creates a barrier that prevents meaningful engagement.

Empathy and understanding are emotional conditions. We cannot simply instruct professionals to “be understanding”. Even if they act as if they are empathetic and avoid *expressing* judgment (as part of something we refer to as “showing professional detachment”), this means they are being inauthentic and insincere.

This book explains a technique that has been used when working with groups from Bulgaria’s child protection services. It is powerful and it can provoke empathy. We have seen this for ourselves. It works.

How does it *provoke* empathy?

In an interview published in 2012, Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert says that if he had to “summarize the scientific literature on the causes of human happiness in one word, that word would be ‘social’”. Gilbert is a positive psychologist. The developmental psychologist, Gordon Neufeld would be more likely to refer to “attachment”. We will add our own word - “relationships”. All the words reflect the idea of human interconnection. Poets and philosophers talked about the concept before psychologists got around to it.

Empathy can be provoked by placing professionals in a position in which they must contemplate their own dependence on their connections with others. We could say that those professionals work with people who suffer because of profoundly faulty connections. It’s painful when connections fail, isn’t it? For those people the pain tends to be prolonged but it is something we can all understand.

The technique described in this book is based on the work of Bert Hellinger, a German psychotherapist who studied psychoanalysis and gestalt therapy. The method depends on Hellinger’s concept of *family constellations*. Essentially, Hellinger is pointing at the same phenomenon as Gilbert and Neufeld and his emphasis on familial bonds and the roles of mothers and fathers is of central importance in the context of Bulgaria’s deinstitutionalisation programme.

In the words of Henry Ward Beecher – “There is no friendship, no love, like that of the parent for the child.” Children deprived of this very special connection are the saddest of all children. By providing social workers with a sense of their own capacity to feel this sadness, we provoke understanding of the “broken family” irrespective of skin colour and wrong-doings of its members. We create empathy.

David and Galina Bisset

CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE PRACTITIONERS

Forward by the authors

Within the text that follows, the ideas upon which the work of Hope and Homes for Children-Bulgaria (HHC-BG) are based meet with ideas drawn from the studies and therapeutic practice of Bert Hellinger. This connection is totally natural for several reasons:

- The RCMDs that have been created in Bulgaria provide an example of systematic thinking dedicated to decision-making and problem solving by those responsible for administering the cases of children affected by deinstitutionalisation. This clearly reflects Hellinger's Law of Belonging, according to which, in order for a system to work well, every person in that system must make their appropriate contribution. Nobody should be excluded.

- The core philosophy states that, for every person, the parents come first. They brought him/her into the world. That is why the natural place for every child is in his/her family. Every professional should respect the sanctity of parenthood and recognise that no child can really have a home without a family.

- The model for Active Family Support, created by Hope and Homes for Children, reflects ideas connected to Hellinger's Law of Balance, according to which constructive relationships between people within a system are possible only if there is a balance between giving and receiving. Our organization supports families, but also requires actions from them and, in this way, a productive partnership is formed.

We believe that this book will give you ideas and insights on social work with children and families.

And we believe that it will also touch your heart!

CHAPTER ONE

Lyudmil Stefanov

TWO CONFLICTING FAMILY IDEOLOGIES

*“If any fundamental rights exist,
then one must be the right of the child of
or his/her parents and family“*

Bert Hellinger

WHERE DO CHILDREN FEEL AT HOME?

At the end of summer the ripe fur cones start to crack and their seeds spread across the whole vicinity.

One of the seeds will fall on a flat sunny spot close to the river. But not close enough for its roots to rot. This seed will grow into a tall tree with a straight trunk, protected by the other trees around it. And it, in turn, will provide protection for the other trees.

Another seed may fall in the plain, among the fields and bushes of hawthorn and rosehip. It will also turn into a tree, but in a different way. Its trunk will grow shorter and wider, so that it can withstand strong gusts of wind. Its crown will have shorter branches and they will be sparse, so that the storm can't bend them and break the tree.

A third seed will find a small crack among rocks and cling to a handful of earth. Then the tree will grow rough and crooked, clinging to the rock and hanging above the precipice. And its roots will extend in all directions looking for nutrients and moisture.

We may be tempted to ask the question – which seed deserves envy, and which deserves pity, which seed has arranged its life best? But the Creator knows that the right place for any tree is right there where the seed has fallen. If we try to move it to another place, supposedly better and safer, the tree will become sick. And it will eventually perish.

It is the same with the human child. One child will be born in a rich home. Another will be born into poverty. One child will receive a lot of support from his/her parents, another will receive less. One will suffer the heat of the desert and will be carried on a camel from oasis to oasis. Another will live in the comfort of the big city. Yet another, wrapped in fur, will sleep in an igloo made of ice and snow.

But for every child the primary connection to life arrives through his / her parents and within the family that they have created. For every child, the best place – home - is within this family. There it feels that primary connection – that ancestral love - that links it to the cycle of life. And that feeling is far more significant and runs deeper than the superficial factors like living conditions and the social status of the parents.

This is why, if we want to provide children in need with a proper home, the positive way to do this is to support their parents and their extended families. By adequately supporting the child’s parents, we focus our efforts towards the foundation of emotional connection and love that naturally exist within the family.

ALL PARENTS ARE ESSENTIALLY GOOD!

Like many followers of Bert Hellinger, participants in the seminars remember a particular expression: “All parents are essentially good!”. “Why are they good?” – people will often ask. The answer is because they are parents and every parent gives their child the most of what they are capable of at any moment in their life.

The work of HHC all around the world is related to the idea of helping families to raise their children by themselves. Poor parents, parents with health problems, parents from marginalised ethnic groups – they all have full parental feelings. Their children also have feelings towards them and this is of considerable importance when, from the position of our authority and the power that we have, we make decisions for the fate of the child.

Often at the HHC seminars in Bulgaria, the participants show forms of resistance that are fairly typical. Many express the opinion that it is better for children from poor and marginalized ethnic groups to be taken out of their families so that they can live in better conditions. Sometimes at these seminars someone will ask a provocative question along the following lines: “Who would you prefer to be your mother, a queen or the one you were born with?”. This question makes all the participants think. Being faced with such a choice the participants realise that we always prefer our own mother and that she is best for us. This applies even though a queen will exceed our mother in terms of social status and wealth to a much greater extent than we exceed the poor people in our countries.

We from HHC – Bulgaria believe that there is something deeply wrong with many of the decisions that lead to separation of the child from its parents. That is why we work on preventing this from happening and we have an active training policy for spreading our ideas among the Bulgarian administration.

**THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN**

The above statements reflect the ideology of the international organisation named Hope and Homes for Children (HHC).

.....

HHC was created by Mark Cook and his wife Caroline in 1994. It was in this year that they witnessed the devastation caused by war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The situation was especially dire for those children in institutions. In many cases, they were left without the necessary care or even reduced to living on the street or in bomb craters.

For this reason, the Cook family initially decided that their organisation should support the residential institutions where children are cared for. They soon realized that the proper place for children is not in these institutions, but with their families. Even the best operating institution cannot give a child the care, attention and love that he/she needs. The institution signifies an **organization**, while the family is an **organism**, something alive and life-giving. The connection that the child has with his / her parents can't be substituted for or replaced. The primary bond between parents and children can't be implanted in an organisation or defined as a work obligation for a professional care provider.

It was on this basis that HHC evolved from an organization designed to improve institutions to an organisation that supports biological families or alternative family-type care. HHC started work on deinstitutionalisation and building national policies to support families to raise their children by themselves instead of leaving them in institutions for various reasons.

As an international charity – Hope and Homes for Children works in Central and Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East and South Africa to reform child protection systems based on institutional care to ensure children their right to grow up in a family, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child. Hope and Homes for Children has active programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan and Ukraine.

The organisation's focus is reforming child protection systems relying on institutional care. Deinstitutionalisation of children - transitioning children out of institutions, keeping together families who are at risk of breakdown and working to prevent child abandonment. Delivering services, mobilising communities, providing training, capacity building, and advocacy. HHC works in partnerships with national and local governments in the countries of operations, local and international NGOs and networks.

Its mission is to be the catalyst for the global eradication of institutional care for children.

The basic principles of HHC's Deinstitutionalisation model are described in the website of Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria (www.hopeandhomesbg.com.)

APPLYING HHC'S MODEL OF ACTIVE FAMILY SUPPORT

This model is being constantly developed and revised in the organisation's operations world-wide. Here we can understand how it works by looking at a specific case described by Elena Petkova- HHC coordinator for Ruse in North-East Bulgaria.

.....

“The model represents a practical, evidence-based form of family support that is:

- Short-term – the support is provided to self the family become self-sufficient and then it is suspended (although the family continues to be supervised);

- Tailored to the needs of the family – help is provided based on researching the individual needs, not as a standard package;

- Strategic – the support is linked to a strategy for the development of the family and its inclusion in the community and we monitor progress and the family’s ability to deal with the challenges set;

On this basis, the model reacts to the specific forms of deprivation and social isolation that lead to families falling apart and the risk of the child being separated from his/her parents.

Using the model, we utilise:

- The family’s total potential and strengths;

- The family’s connections with the community as a source of support and resources;

- Access to financial help and community based services (social, healthcare, educational etc.)

The big question is - How do we go about mobilizing these factors without creating a situation in which the family becomes dependent?

The answer to this question involves putting in place the bases for a partnership with the family through careful negotiation of the terms of engagement.

In one particular case, we were introduced to a family so as to assess the potential for reintegration of their sixth child. The child had been in a specialized residential institution for a year because of frequent illness.

While assessing the family’s circumstances, we were seriously concerned about the severely dilapidated home provided by the local municipality. The structural flaws made the house dangerous for the entire family (two older boys aged 21 and 22 and three younger children aged 8, 10 and 11). Both the state of the house and the material living conditions meant that the return of the infant was out of the question.

We helped the family by negotiating more suitable municipal housing. However, the new accommodation that was offered was difficult to access because of a damaged stairway that would present a direct risk for the children.

Working in partnership with the family and supported by the NGO Equilibrium that manages the Complex for social support in Ruse, we were able to arrange contracts, specifications and deadlines for a total renovation of the house and we created a step-by-step plan.

HHC – Bulgaria agreed to provide the necessary building materials for the repair of the stairs as a priority and - afterwards - one of the three rooms which the mother would inhabit with the four younger children. Responsibility for the other two bedrooms fell upon the two older boys who would occupy them.

They both had jobs and they agreed to buy a boiler for the whole family and to renovate and redecorate the remaining parts of the house. The earning power of these boys was acknowledged as a family strength.

An obvious problem for the family was the fact that they didn't have any knowledge or experience of building and decorating and paying contractors was out of the question. For this reason, we negotiated with a father from another Roma family that we had supported within the organisation's programme. The man agreed to provide help for free but with the active involvement of the family's older sons.

As a result of their joint efforts the house was refurbished. HHC - Bulgaria also provided essential food, clothing and items of furniture. The family's outstanding water bill was paid to prevent disconnection but we asked for the commitment of the sons and the mother when it came to regular payment of charges for water in the future. The financial support provided by HHC – BG was designed purely to eliminate those problems that prevented the return of the infant.

Together with the entire family, we planned a monthly domestic budget and the worked out how the various family members would contribute. The budget needed to be realistic and sustainable once we had withdrawn financial support.

The case was removed from the programme of HHC - BG after a period of 3 months during which we had monitored progress and assured ourselves that the family could fulfil all agreed obligations.

The family had been referred to Ruse centre of social support managed by Equilibrium and management of the case extended over a six month period. After this period had expired both HHC-BG and Equilibrium had only intermittent contact with the family.

The family sometimes turns to us in moments of seeming crisis. In these situations, they simply need someone to talk to and to be reminded of the steps that they can take to help themselves because they have the capability and sufficient resources to do things for themselves.

MEDICALISATION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

'My wavy hair goes straight when I read the government specifications for child healthcare. In these regulations the state uses its own interest as its sole criteria and doesn't show any concern for the physical welfare of its citizens.'

/Waldo Bernasconi "La nevrosi di potere", ("The Neurosis of Power")

Lying in polar opposition to HHC's ideology are the medicalisation and institutionalization of the personal and social lives of people.

Medicalisation is related to the idea that all a person's basic functions should be submitted to medical supervision.

Using the health-illness dichotomy to define a person turns that person into a patient when (s)he does not need to be. The obvious purpose of enforcing

this ideology on society is to gradually turn the person into a donor for the healthcare system, and the healthcare system itself – into a profitable market for medical services.

The problem of institutional care for children is similar. All around the world there are professionals from the healthcare, social and educational spheres, as well as religious leaders, who state with conviction that institutionalisation is the best option for a child especially in the case of children from socially disadvantaged families or marginalized groups. This misguided conviction leads to the routine separation of children from loving families and deprives children of the opportunity to form nurturing attachments to their parents. No institution can provide an acceptable alternative to love and attachment.

The experience in Bulgaria shows that the pressure of the institutions to separate children from their parents and isolate them from mainstream society has been especially strong in the cases of children born with physical or mental disabilities, developmental disorders or chronic illness.

TOTALITARIANISM AND INSTITUTIONS

In Bulgaria, special homes for raising children with disabilities who had been abandoned by their parents were created during an intensive phase of building that started at the end of the 1950s. As a matter of policy, these facilities were located “away from the eyes of people” so as not to affect the emotional state of the healthy.

Bulgarian sociologist, Krasimir Brajkov tells the story in his article “National policy in Bulgaria for disadvantaged children. Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation.” (<http://liternet.bg>): “These social facilities were created on the basis of the prevailing medical philosophy, according to which disabled children could receive adequate medical, social and educational care only in specialised facilities and when cared for by the relevant specialists. The issue of abandoned healthy children in need of socialisation and preparation for independent living was treated in a similar fashion. They were also institutionalised in the relevant facilities.”

The author shares personal observations that could be confirmed by the people connected professionally to the life of children in the social facilities. In the majority of cases, the material living conditions of these children and their educational needs are better met in institutional care than they would be at home. “In the meanwhile there is no guarantee for meeting or providing for other basic needs – building of personal identity, of autonomy, of individual treatment and emotional contact with an adult, of real personal space and comfort. In other words, the whole process of socialisation for children in institutions is greatly troubled and/or doesn’t proceed in a way that is considered normal in our culture.”

According to the author, these children “fall into two socially submissive groups.” On the one hand, there is submission to the regime at the home, and on

the other, there is minority sation at school. In this way, the children from institutions are submitted to greater levels of coercion and domination by institutional power. “These processes are the root of the so-called social pathologies in children, which turn them into ‘victims’ of power domination and institutionalisation, making them incapable of independent living and totally dependent on the institution itself.”

We can certainly show that medicalisation and institutionalisation represent a social practice that is enforced with great consistency by the leaders of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. They are motivated by the desire to isolate all “problem” people from society, so as not to disturb the peace of the others and not to darken their picture of the “bright future”. This problem is obviously connected to the way the government operates.

In recent years, as a result of democratic changes, a contrasting focus on social integration has emerged in Bulgaria. Children with special educational needs are being admitted into the mainstream schools. There has been desegregation of schools where only Roma children study. Institutions for children without parental care located in the most remote parts of the country are being closed or are drawing the attention of the media and provoking public interest.

Part of this broad process of social integration is represented by the current deinstitutionalisation policy and the political will that shaped it. The HHC mission is related to supporting and developing this process, which makes us a natural partner of the government.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN IN BULGARIA

After the first steps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, HHC gradually expanded its work in other countries in Eastern Europe and, more recently, in Africa.

In 2010, as a joint venture with the Bulgarian NGO, Equilibrium (EQ), HHC undertook the closure of the Home for Medical Social Care for Children (HMSCC) in the town of Teteven and the placement of 32 children aged 0-3 in families. This actually provided the model for the development of the deinstitutionalisation process during the years to come.

In January 2012 a project called “Strategic deinstitutionalisation and reform of care for children aged 0-3 in Bulgaria” started in support of the Ministry of Health’s project “Direction family”. It is intended as part of this project to close eight HMSCCs in Sofia, Pernik, Montana, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Targovishte, Gabrovo, Ruse, Razgrad and Silistra regions. HHC continues to be an active participant and supporter of this process.

The main spheres of the organisation’s work are:

- Prevention – work with families for preventing cases of child abandonment. This is the first and most important step for closing an HMSCC. Only in this way can the flow of new-born children towards the institution be stopped;

- Reintegration – the right place for the child is in his/her biological family. HHC's experience in Bulgaria shows that many families, primarily those of Roma origin, leave their children in an institution because of their inability to resolve their domestic problems. The emotional bond between children and parents exists. And when they are supported to overcome these difficulties, they become open to the idea of keeping their children in the family and retaining responsibility for their upbringing.

- Expansion of the foster family network – foster care is the main instrument for implementing Bulgarian deinstitutionalisation policy. The trained foster families provide a home and family care for children during the period when their biological families are preparing to reintegrate them or an adoptive family is being found.

CHAPTER TWO

Georgi Simeonov

*CEO of Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria -
the main figure in the creation of the RCMD in the country*

The Regional coordination mechanism for deinstitutionalisation - a systematic approach for administration and decision-making

DRIFTING BETWEEN TWO LIFE-RAFTS

The great anthropologist and mariner Thor Heyerdahl tells a dramatic story. Sailing on a raft and being carried by the ocean currents, he noticed that big pieces of the wood used to construct the raft were breaking off and slowly sinking to the bottom of the ocean. It was becoming apparent that the wood used for building the craft lacked the moisture and natural resins that stop the absorption of the salty sea water. The raft literally started to fall apart under the feet of the crew and was sinking piece by piece.

There was only one solution: to build a new raft from the empty barrels and chests that the crew used to store water, food and equipment. Everybody set to work. The mission was life saving. In the end they managed to build this new improvised raft and save themselves.

According to Heyerdahl, the greatest danger was that during the building of the rescue raft the crew had to use all the seaworthy planks, clamps, wedges and dowels used to hold the old raft together. They had no other option. In the most critical moment, the sailors could have drowned between two rafts; one that was sinking and another that was not yet built.

This metaphor illustrates the dangers that accompany any change or reform in social systems. Deinstitutionalisation is a typical example: the institutions that have been taking care of the abandoned children are being closed, while the new multi-faceted system has not yet started to operate routinely. There is a risk that the children and their families could “sink” between two systems: one that is being dismantled and another that is not yet built.

The institutional raising of children, with all its shortcomings, represents a long-standing practice. The institution takes charge of every abandoned newborn baby and in some cases even promotes abandonment. It then provides the child the minimum needed for survival. Institutional staff are ready to take any cases and set the process of institutionalisation in progress. This applies most vigorously in the case of children with special needs as it has long been felt that the residential institution is the “right place” for them to be cared for.

Meanwhile, the families of children officially designated as being “at risk” are not always adequately supported to ameliorate that risk. If these children are to remain outside the institution, if they are to be cared for in a family environment, then the adults/parents, adoptive or foster families need coordinated support. And this means support at administrative or organisational level. During the period of transition between systems – when the family can find itself drifting between life-rafts –inter-agency cooperation need to be promoted and supported.

In order to provide this support, HHC-BG created the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Deinstitutionalisation (RCMD).

This administrative model has already received recognition in Bulgaria as well as internationally. It has been recognised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy¹ of Bulgaria as one the ten best practices in the social sphere. The description of the model is also included in a special book published by the regional office of UNICEF for Eastern Europe, in which positive practices for creating supportive environment for children aged 0 to 3 are recommended – ‘Compendium of promising practices’² to ensure that children under the age of three grow up in a safe and supportive family environment”. It has been identified as best practice in delivering the EC recommendation ‘Investing in children: breaking the vicious circle of disadvantage’ by the Alliance for Investing in Children³.

CREATION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RCMD

The overarching objective of our organisation – one that we share with the government - is that, by implementing the policies for deinstitutionalisation, there will be no children being raised in residential institutions and that these facilities can be closed. They should be raised in a family or something we describe as a family-type environment. In order to accomplish this go alsignificant resources are being provided, large-scale national projects are being undertaken, hundreds of professionals are being engaged and a new social infrastructure of services for children and families is being built. Despite all this, the unsound practice of placing children in institutions continues.

Yes, a large amount of the necessary resources are provided. My experience as a consultant and manager in the social services sector (that started well before joining HHC) has shown me, many times, that very little resources are required to empower a family and enable parents to keep their children and take care of them. Often children are abandoned because of domestic crises that can and should be more effectively handled – financial hardship or a lack of adequate help and support when a parent or other bread-

¹<http://www.childtransnet.com/en/>
²http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_Compndium_of_promising_practices_Web.pdf
³<http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/EU-Alliance-Implementation-Handbook.pdf>

winner loses the capacity to provide for the children. Look at the elements of the support needed – short-term financial support or the provision of essentials and rehabilitation of the family.

Sometimes, the focus is on food, nappies and clothing for the children. At other times it is about basic domestic appliances and equipment that many organisations collect during their charity events. Their offices are full of second-hand furniture, baby gear and electrical appliances. New items are often donated by commercial suppliers.

At other times, homes need refurbishment. Arrival of a new baby may demand that a room in the house is made suitable for nursing. Home renovation sounds expensive but it needn't be, not if family members are supported in a DIY effort and/or volunteers from the community are mobilised.

Regrettably, because of situations that are easily remediable, thousands of Bulgarian children are institutionalised causing deep trauma to them and their parents. Meanwhile, caring for institutionalised children burdens the finance ministry with huge expenses.

My discussions on the subject of deinstitutionalisation with representatives of different institutions (healthcare, education, municipal authorities, police etc.) have shown that largely they support this policy - they want change to happen - but attribute the main responsibility to the social protection system.

Yes, there were resources available, there was expertise and commitment, but the thing that was missing was the “meeting place” where they could come together and start to act in a coordinated fashion and with a shared purpose.

This is why the RCMD was created and it is managed directly by the governor of each region in which it is put in place. The mechanism is unique to Bulgaria although there are alternative approaches in other countries. Its success depends on its being a local solution for a local problem. The strategic goal was to apply administrative authority to the task of bringing together professionals from different institutions to talk about the specific troublesome cases that frequently arise in the context of deinstitutionalisation. On this basis, the RCMD represents a system for inter-agency problem solving and decision making in support of specific families and children at risk.

The representatives within the RCMD are from the highest possible administrative level from the various institutions in the region and this guarantees the necessary swift solution of complex cases as well as careful and purposeful monitoring of their development. The RCMD includes permanent members that are either heads or senior representatives of a wide range of agencies: Regional Administration, Municipal Administration, Regional Directorate of Social Assistance, Regional Health and Safety Inspectorate, Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, Regional Education Authority, Child Protection Department, Local Directorate (child rights control) of the State Agency for Child Protection.

Associate members of the RCMD include NGO representatives working in the sphere of child protection, social service providers and other organisations and institutions with a stake in the deinstitutionalisation process.

It becomes clear that the RCMD accumulates within itself the three main components needed to find effective solutions to social cases: authority, expertise and resources.

The work of the RCMD involves convening regular meetings in order to solve specific cases and if necessary specific representatives of municipal, healthcare, educational and cultural institutions are invited if this assists in building a picture of the case.

It is important to point out that often these meetings are attended by representatives of the families themselves. They actively participate in the discussions, share their opinions and make commitments. This guarantees their full engagement and acceptance of responsibility for the future. It turns them from social welfare clients or consumers into genuine partners in the process of finding solutions in the best interests of their children.

I should probably explain why we refer to a *Regional* Coordination Mechanism and not a Municipal Coordination Mechanism.

Although they have local planning and decision-making capability, most structures at local level – social welfare, healthcare, education and security are run by the state and the regional administration is responsible for monitoring and controlling their work.

Why Coordination Mechanism? The role of the mechanism is to coordinate efforts in the best interests of children subject to deinstitutionalisation or affected by it. If the appropriate service for a child at risk is in a different town or municipal district, the process of social support is realised much more easily and effectively if the service providers and the people who work with the family periodically meet under the direction of the regional governor.

What is meant by “mechanism”? Inside a mechanical clock is a balancing device or anchor. It regulates and controls the speed of the whole complicated clock mechanism and ensures steady and planned energy consumption. Without it, the energy within the system would be unleashed uncontrollably and to no effective purpose. The function of the coordination mechanism is similar: to regulate and direct the use of resources. They are consumed in the right way and at the right time so as to work in the best interests of the family and the child.

PREVENTION OF THE USUAL DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND DECISION-MAKING

The simple practice of bringing together these representatives of different agencies in order to sit together at a table to discuss the problems of specific families in need creates conditions for overcoming fairly easily and imperceptibly all the most common factors that prevent effective multidisciplinary work.

Here are the usual problems that affect the management of social services and social management as a whole:

- Record keeping and communication systems are different within the different agencies because they have diverse priorities. This hampers information sharing (pertinent details are not automatically transferred) and impacts on the quality of decisions impacting on families. By holding regular meetings in the office of the governor this key issue, which burdens the efficiency of every administration, starts to resolve itself.

- Subjective or attitudinal factors have an impact - bad professional relationships, lack of trust and confidence in the professionalism of other agencies and institutions, insufficient or non-existent sharing of learning between disciplines. These problems diminish when there is increased personal contact among the most senior administrative managers in the region. In addition to the coordination mechanism, HHC organizes seminars, working meetings and public forums where these people can come together and collaborate. Tsvetelina Arapova-Chavdarova is director of the Regional Directorate for Social Assistance in Pazardjik and was previously a regional coordinator for HHC and organiser of the activities of the Pazardjik RCMD. Here are her revealing comments on this issue:

- "The members of the RCMD in Pazardjik region now look forward to every meeting with great eagerness. During random encounters around town they ask me: 'What's happening? Aren't we all going to get together again?' These meetings make them work together and they now feel comfortable about sharing their problems and resolve them together. At these meetings unexpected resources are revealed, support is received from colleagues in other agencies. What was viewed as a burden and waste of time at the start has now turned into a necessity."

- Apparent lack of time and resources, as well as an assumed lack of trained personnel, are also among the typical factors that prohibit multidisciplinary work. The coordination mechanism creates a situation that reveals how hollow these pessimistic assumptions actually are. They are excuses and not reasons for a poor collective performance. The resources are in the system but they may not be distributed to make them readily available at the points at which they are needed. For example, someone may claim that a lack of transport prevents her visiting a family in a rural location. Fair enough. However, HHC has a pool car. Other agencies also have vehicles. Let's share.

- The Child Protection Department may claim that they can't accommodate a family in a municipal home and it is living in a shack. They have no registered address and this causes bureaucratic difficulty and prevents the family from accessing social support.

- Another family may lack the appropriate medical certificate for an illness or disability and the procedures for providing social support are blocked.

- By bringing together senior members of the Ministry of Interior, Regional Health Inspectorate and other related agencies, the RCMD shows how essentially facile these barriers faced by many families actually are.

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- Imagine the case of a foster family in crisis because it is hard to find places for the children in the local school or kindergarten. Among educators there is often prejudice towards children raised in residential institutions whose behavior can be challenging. They reduce class averages in academic tests or may lag behind others in their age group. All these things can be true. However, when we bring together senior representatives from the municipal education authority, the head of the education inspectorate and a representative of the centre for social support, options appear. Social services can work with teachers, pedagogical advisors and the foster family to devise workable solutions that are in the child's best interest. It turns out that because we have gathered together to resolve common problems. Multiple resources are available to everyone at the table. Past excuses are no longer convincing. At the next meeting, you can't say that your contribution to the case has faltered if circumstances appear routine and normal to the others present. Nobody would accept this unless the impediment was unforeseen and significant.

INITIAL MISTRUST AND RESISTANCE

The initial reactions when we started creating the RCMD in the first seven regions were similar. Everywhere the suspicion was that this was an exercise that provided HHC with funding and it would waste time and energy at regional level. It was an imposition and it wouldn't work.

During the first few meetings the grumbling persisted. We experienced both explicit resistance and passive resistance. These forms of resistance are common in government departments and relate to a lack of motivation. Here are some examples:

- People attended the meetings but retained no record of commitments made. It was widely assumed that engagement would end the minute the governor's door slammed shut at the end of the meeting;

- "Group noise" – a focus on generalities or past events that had nothing to do with the specific case. This widespread tendency of talking without saying anything much disappeared after the first two-to-three meetings of the coordination mechanism;

- Passing the buck whereby everyone tries to claim that this problem has nothing to do with their department. In this way, the issue is passed around like a hot potato, instead of being dealt with effectively. Inevitably, this type of unprofessional behaviour becomes an embarrassment when the families in need or their advocates are present. In this way, the mechanism, in itself, is a very good way of preventing buck-passing which is more comfortably achieved behind closed doors.

BREAKING THE RESISTANCE

Eventually we reached the point at which resistance fizzled out and relationships changed for the better. The main factors allowing this to happen were as follows:

- A change in attitude: This is the preeminent factor that brought about transformation. RCMD participants had to become convinced in their own minds that institutional care harms children and should be avoided. They now fully understand that, even when socially vulnerable people seem to produce child after child in a way that makes it easy to level the accusation that they are reckless and a “social burden”, with minimal support, their capacity as good, loving parents can be recognized and fulfilled. This shift in thinking was shown during our personal discussions with representatives of the administration. It was also measured as a positive tendency in the comprehensive survey that we commissioned with representatives of the RCMDs in the years 2012 and 2013;

- Confidence also grew after HHC demonstrated the potential of its model for ACTIVE family support that the organisation uses internationally. This model shows how to support families at risk so that they can quickly become self-sufficient. Professionals came to recognize that families that are too easily demonised are capable of developing their own resources and quickly reaching self-sufficiency if interventions focus on their strengths and provide the minimal resources needed to play to those strengths;

- The training sessions not only provided key competencies, they instilled values and had a powerful motivational effect;

- The regular meetings deepened the personal contact among participants and turned informal discussion of cases into a regular and systematised practice. In relation to this, I can quote Milen Gechovski, Deputy Governor of Montana, who shared his opinion during a conversation: “For us it is now hardly necessary to bring together the RCMD. We resolve our issues operationally with one phone call.”

This statement shows how far those participating in the RCMD have travelled. However, regular meetings remain important especially when constant change of administrative personnel is taken into consideration and there is a need to integrate new people into the RCMD;

- Reporting is systematised and commitments are recorded not only by the HHC coordinator but also by those individuals who have voiced the commitment to act. Those things that have been accomplished since the prior meeting are recorded and they form the foundation for future actions. This is one of the strongest motivators for joint action. You can't simply wave your hand and say that you haven't completed your engagements (as well as providing excuses), especially in front of people that you see often and already feel close to. The regional governor is in the chair. Authority coexists with shared responsibility.

- Lawsuits have been won by HHC concerning cases of children being taken out of their families and threatened with institutionalisation without good

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reason or evidence of due process. This shows that, increasingly, judges are concerned for the child’s best interests and decide they should be raised in their biological families. This provided HHC with credibility and authority – institutionalisation could be successfully contested and could no longer represent the convenient route for child protection officers.

CREATING DIALOGUE

I’d like to share the thoughts of Kalinka Ilieva about the first steps of the RCMD. Kalinka is a social worker from the Child Protection Department in Targovishte who is working on the project “Building the Capacity of the Agency for Social Assistance” and monitoring the work with children in the Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children. She is naturally heavily involved in the most intractable cases of children leaving the HMSCC. The quote is taken from personal conversations between Kalinka and our coordinator for Targovishte, Ivelina Doneva-Racheva:

“In the beginning, when people started talking about the coordination mechanism, many of us were concerned that this could just turn out to be the latest non-functioning structure - a fad. Meanwhile, the government policy was changing and there was a need to work towards deinstitutionalisation. The clock was ticking. It was becoming increasingly clear that, without partnership with the nongovernmental sector, things were not going to work out.

Because the problems were serious. Especially the public attitude towards deinstitutionalisation. We were constantly hearing opinions like: “This isn’t going to work! Why should we close these newly refurbished homes? At least the children are kept warm and fed in these places. Why should we return them to their misery? If this happens the staff will be left without jobs! They will be a burden on the social system.”

There was also an obvious mistrust towards the NGOs – the notion that they only spend money and yield no results. That is why it was often considered a better option for the staff of the under-resourced and over-stretched Child Protection Department to do everything themselves and avoid NGO involvement.”

There was also pressure arising from the attitude towards HHC. With Equilibrium, the organisation had closed the first “baby home” in Teteven. This won the two organizations respect but it did not provide a fan club. The situation was complicated and confused. It had become obvious that after the initial process of taking children out of the home, which happened with a great lack of desire among local agencies, the home started to fill again. Children from Kotel and other homes were being accommodated... Obviously this was the action of public forces that were trying to counteract the closure of the homes and destabilise deinstitutionalisation policy.

Eventually the working version of the RCMD turned into a unifying force for achieving deinstitutionalisation. And time has shown that it would have been even better if we could have created it earlier. It was missing during the Teteven

closure and during the earlier phase of the national deinstitutionalisation process placing extreme pressure on the people upon whose shoulders responsibility fell at that time.

Great sensitivity and negotiation skill was necessary to bring together the representatives of so many institutions and have them openly discuss cases and coordinate their actions. This led to the mobilisation of very large administrative capacity. It transpired that the regional administration is really capable of finding fast solutions for complex cases. In our work speed is of great importance. Delays impact heavily on families and more especially on young children.

Eventually trust emerged – towards the process (the RCMD) and towards its originator (HHC-BG). I need to acknowledge that the NGO sector contains many other organisations and people who work for children and families with a great deal of skill, love and commitment. But – at regional level - I see HHC as the binding link between government departments and NGOs. The essential focus was on dialogue. From my position within the NGO sector, I could sense that my peers were thinking mainly about one thing - how to create and support dialogue.

WHEN TRUST EXISTS

There is now a great difference in the attitudes towards our organisation in the new regions where we are starting work. The organisation now has a track record and shows demonstrable results.

When asked whether there was any initial resistance when HHC started working in Silistra, Vanja Rajcheva, head of the Child Protection Department, answered as follows:

“I haven’t experienced any resistance regarding our combined work, because by monitoring the children’s development in both the institutional and family environment we have come to the conclusion that in families children fare better. At home they are held more often, they are spoken to more often, hugged, kissed and taken for walks outside more often. In the institution, even if the living conditions have improved, babies are kept in their cots all day and are attended to on the basis of an hourly schedule. The main intention is to satisfy their basic needs for food, toilet, sleep and medication. When individual care is missing it isn’t possible for the child to develop a strong bond and their emotional and neurological development is slowed down.”

Also indicative are the thoughts shared by Lili Docheva, senior expert in the Regional Administration in Silistra and a member of the RCMD:

“A year ago, at the end of 2013, the Regional Administration of Silistra received from the Bulgarian office of the British NGO, Hope and Homes for Children, an offer for partnership and cooperation in the process of deinstitutionalisation of the children in our region. The memorandum of agreement was signed in February 2014 and, a month later the RCMD was started. It really turned out to be a successful formula for joint work, just like

Georgi Simeonov and Boryana Klimentova had suggested at the first meeting with HHC.

Immediately after I learned about HHC I looked through their website, which is full of useful information about their work and reflects the most current events and activities in the country that they take part in. When the RCMD was started, it was useful to have examples from the practice of creating such mechanisms in another seven regional capitals where great results have been achieved. The way we worked through the stages of specific cases, the shared commitment of RCMD members and the way things were organised has convinced me that our joint work is leading to the effective transformation of care for children in our region.

The expert help that we also receive in the form of trainings for specialists providing social services for children and families arrived exactly when it is needed during the period of reforming the Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children – it’s directly relevant - and that is why it is very important and valuable for us.

I trust HHC-BG because of the great professionalism with which their team works, as well as their permanent readiness for dialogue and discussion of issues that arise.”

THE CASE OF A SINGLE CHILD

“Is it worth getting all these people together to discuss the case of one single child?”

Whose voice is this?

There is no mistake. This is the voice of a manager in the child protection system who is sceptical and who continues to resist the idea of the coordination mechanism. I mention this problem especially because it helps explain the entire shift in attitude in Bulgarian social work. Each RCMD brings together senior professionals who initially felt committed only to creating local policies and directing public processes and not working on specific cases. Our aim, however, is for people with power and authority to become engaged personally with the problems of the most vulnerable social groups of Bulgarian society. By not doing so, their decisions can obstruct or subvert the work of frontline service providers.

Here are the factors that dissolve scepticism:

- The first work meetings at which real results are achieved;
- Sharing of information within both professional circles and the community. In the end the growing awareness and popularity of the work of the RCMD help overcome resistance;

- Work on prevention of institutionalisation is stipulated as part of the child protection repertoire but administrative delays really impact on its effectiveness. In a highly hierarchal system, fast decisions depend a great deal on gaining the involvement of those a senior managerial level as early as possible. If delays are permitted, and, as a result, a child is separated from his/her family and placed “temporarily” in an institution (ostensibly a stop-gap measure), the nurturing bond

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between child and parent is damaged. A few days' separation can impact on the development of an infant. Parental guilt or anger over separation adds to the difficulties of social workers.

CORRUPT PRACTICE THAT HARMS FAMILIES

It is natural to use the capacity of the RCMD not only for solving specific cases but also for influencing the creation of new policy. Attitudinal resistance to deinstitutionalisation is deeply rooted in the child protection and healthcare systems in Bulgaria.

In some of the towns in which we have created RCMDs, we have faced difficulties because of lingering attitudes linked to the old system (left from the time of socialism).

Let's take the case of premature birth. In certain towns, the neonatal units are situated in the HMSCCs (in the former "Home for mother and babies"). In this way, a convenient conduit is created, by which means the medical unit that cares for prematurely born babies can direct infants towards the residential institution. They, have, ostensibly, been *abandoned* but is this really an accurate description of events when coercion and obstructive behaviour impacts on families?

Conditions are created that prevent mothers from accessing their babies thus severing the nurturing bond between new-born and mother on the basis of institutional practice.

In one of the training seminars, a participant and member of the coordination mechanism, shared how she herself had had given birth prematurely some years ago. In tears she searched the neonatal unit looking for the opportunity to see her baby but access was denied. The "healthcare" strategy wasn't directed towards connecting the mother with the child which would actually have been a *heal their* option for both of them. The World Health Organisation both condones and promotes "kangaroo care" or skin-to-skin contact for mother and premature baby. However, separation and isolation of the child continue to be medical priorities in Bulgaria despite the lack of a justifiable reason.

HHC is leading a campaign in order to introduce a new policy regarding care for new-borns with special needs and there needs to be an improvement in consideration for parents in disadvantaged situations. A new approach for premature babies is needed urgently and medical attitudes towards babies born with disabilities or developmental disorders must change. The desire to remove babies from unmarried mothers, teenage mothers or mothers from disadvantaged families (especially if the baby has a medical deformity or disability) as a routine "protective" action by medical practitioners cannot continue.

The RCMD helps the development of opposition to unjustified separation of mother and new-born. Mothers cannot be coerced into abandoning their babies on the basis of medical attitudes and practice. Where there is a risk of abandonment, specially trained social workers/counsellors need to be granted

immediate access to the mother (even before the baby is born). These infants cannot automatically be seen as “prime candidates” for institutional care.

ACCESSIBLE AND SUPPORTIVE

HHC wins the sympathy of the representatives of the RCMD members and the public because our people remain accessible and work proactively within each community we enter. We fund and support training and other activities as the need is drawn to our attention. There is no fixed package that people can simply take or leave.

For HHC the process of deinstitutionalisation necessarily involves supporting and coaching the personnel from that old system so that their transition to working in new community-based services is not stressful or traumatic.

In this way, we support the teams that have worked in the institutions, even though the mission of our organisation is to expedite the implementation of government policy and close all residential institutions. I think that in this way we manage to soften the effect of the deinstitutionalisation process for the people who are directly affected by it.

CHAPTER THREE

Galina Bisset

Regional Manager for Eastern Europe, Hope and Homes for Children, and creator of the training programme for the RCMD in Bulgaria

Training programme for the RCMD

THE THREE LEVELS OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING

The aim of the series of seminars for representatives of the RCMD is for us together to seek the answers to three main questions related to the process of deinstitutionalisation (DI): Why? What? How?

- **Why? The question of purpose.** Why should we be so determined in the process of deinstitutionalisation? Why should we strive to reintegrate children into families when so many of the mums and dads can be identified as people with “low parental capacity”? Isn’t it better simply to improve institutional care? After all, with the help of many donors, aren’t material conditions getting better? Aren’t institutional care teams better trained nowadays? Aren’t ethical guidelines better? The question “Why?” clearly points to values and motivation. Unless they internalise the answer to the question -Why? - we can’t expect the participants in the RCMD to be dedicated to their mission of supporting vulnerable families to raise their children. The training tells them why.

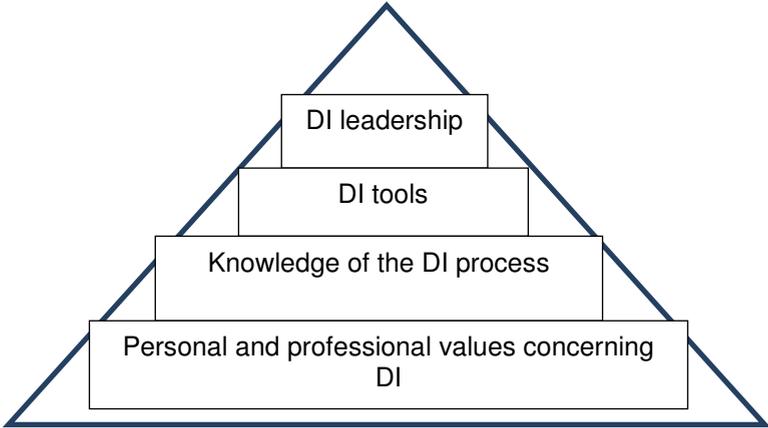
- **What? The question of action.** What actions must we undertake in order to help vulnerable families take care of their children?

- **How? The question of method / approach / tools.** Can we identify and employ effective strategies and tools so that the support is really adequate? We need practical, high-impact solutions not just abstract method. We need to use the strengths of the family and to mobilise available resources in the home and community in a way that prevents the development of dependency and the expectation that the state is always available to take responsibility for their children.

THE PROGRAMME IN OUTLINE

The training programme consists of six modules. Participants are drawn from the regional administrations, Regional Directorates of Social Support, Municipal Directorates for Social Support, Child Protection Departments, municipal authorities, Regional Health Inspectorates, hospitals, local coordinators of the Ministry of Healthcare, Regional Education Inspectorates,

institutions for medical and social care, NGOs and other specialists with a stake in the deinstitutionalisation process at regional level.



Logically, at the base of the pyramid are placed the value-based aspects of the training.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL VALUES CONCERNING DI

This first module is based on primary research into the beliefs and attitudes that the representatives of the RCMD have for the DI in Bulgaria. The author of the research, Lyudmil Stefanov, is a psychologist and he leads the training for this module that is offered to the participants in two parts:

- 1. “*At home and in the home – the divide between the family and the institution*”
- 2. “*A systematic approach towards understanding the family*”

The training sessions are based on the systematic approach and the family constellation method developed by Bert Hellinger. Over the years, Hellinger’s work has developed beyond these formats to become what he now calls Movements of the Soul – an approach that has influenced thousands of working practitioners around the world. Even if they don’t follow him in all his methods, they apply and adapt his original ideas to a wide range of personal, family, organisational and political issues.

Of course, in this module other methods are also applied, the links with the work of other psychologist and theorists are pursued and a variety of methods and techniques are used. After all, everything is dedicated to the aim: of helping participants to experience the life and emotional state of the children in institutions, to be internally connected with the fate of parents, to emotionally experience the role and experience of foster families and adoptive parents, and to develop and re-evaluate their personal attitude towards their situation.

In this module the participants learn what it means to play the role of the “good adult” in the lives of children. Additionally, they learn to understand the basic ideas of the approaches towards the family as a system and the need for

mutual respect between the institutions and parents as a base for their successful work on behalf of the children.

The training module ends with discussing and adopting a set of principles for decision making within the RCMD:

- Paramount importance of the child's best interest translated in observing all children's right as set out in the UNCRC

- The child has the right to be raised by his/her own parents. The parents are responsible for raising their children ensuring their adequate development and they have the right to be supported if they experience difficulties to care for their child

- Poverty alone is never a reason to separate children from their parents
- Families and children are partners in the process
- Children must grow up in families for their harmonious development and fulfilment of their potential

- It is crucially important to develop the child's capacity to form and express opinion on issues that affect him/her, in accordance with age and maturity

- Priority in child protection is to preserve family relationships, which includes placing siblings together if they need alternative care

- It is very important to raise the child in the spirit of their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background

- Strict confidentiality

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEINSTITUTIONALISATION PROCESS

The second module is mainly focused on the question: Why are institutions harmful for children?

Discussions are focused on early child development, the new discoveries of neurology from studying the brains of children that have been brought up in families and those that have been brought up in institutions, as well as the effects of institutional care on child development and attachment disorder.

The attachment theory and neurological research are introduced.

The third module is aimed at sharing the experience of HHC in closing institutions: How do you go about closing an institution?

The goal is for the participants to get acquainted with the positive practices in closing institutions for children aged 0-3 years. The roles and responsibilities of the participants at national and local level are reviewed.

The practical experience gained by HHC during the closure of institutions for children 0 – 3 in Bulgaria is presented in a variety of ways: presentations, films, publications, external evaluations.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION TOOLS

The fourth module is focused on the practical aspects of deinstitutionalisation regarding prevention work and family support. Here

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we seek an answer to the question: “What does it mean to support families and to prevent the separation of the child from his/her family?”

During this module, participants are presented with the experience of HHC in providing ACTIVE family support for parents that are experiencing difficulties by helping them to continue caring for their children or to take their children back from the institutions. We also review the multidisciplinary approach for providing family support with the main participants in this process. The participants learn about the key principles, main values and elements of the model as well as the most important spheres of intervention.

The module covers community based services and support for the children within their families by focusing on children aged 0-3 years. The participants are encouraged to identify problem areas in service provision and to review their municipal and regional strategies for social service development.

Some of the HHC’s instruments for evaluating and planning support are presented. Work is done on specific cases in order to demonstrate how the instruments work in practice.

The fifth module also concerns the mechanisms and instruments for deinstitutionalization. In this module the subject is formulated as follows: ‘Family and community-based forms of care for children and support services for alternative care’

This module examines foster care and adoption, family type accommodation (small-group homes) and community-based services in support of alternative care for children. During the seminars the participants are encouraged to identify problem issues and to review their municipal and regional strategies for development of social services.

In order to challenge local stereotypes, a number of models from Western and Eastern Europe are introduced.

DI LEADERSHIP

In the sixth module the aim of the seminars is to find an answer to the key questions: How should the point of entry to the institutional system be closed? How do we create and run a child protection system free of institutions? By creating the RCMD, HHC has built a dynamic system for a new, high-quality approach towards the deinstitutionalisation process in Bulgaria. The aim of this sixth module is for the participants to understand “How do we work effectively within the coordination mechanism?”

The content of the module is focused at three main topics: “What does coordination mechanism mean?”; “Who are its members?” and “Responsibilities and duties of every member of the coordination mechanism”. The key priorities and main functions and responsibilities of the members of the coordination mechanism are presented based on the specific local conditions and as a result of revelations arising during the training. Special attention is paid to improving the skills of the trainees for communication, stating a case, dealing with

differences of opinion, conflict management, teamwork and effective inter-institutional partnership for determining the best decisions for every child.

The systems for prevention of children being placed in institutions are specific for every country. The common characteristics are:

- They are created at a level that can involve all participants in the process;
- They work with individual cases of children and families;
- They combine the resources of different agencies and structures, focusing on the child's best interest;
- The participants have the power to make decisions (they manage institutions or are authorised to make decisions);
- The cases are presented in written form in advance, so that the participants can consult their experts before the meetings;
- The cases are only presented for the attention of the coordination mechanisms **after** the child protection system has failed to find a solution;
- The cases are monitored until stability of the family situation is achieved;

Training resources used (available in the local language)

1. Kevin Browne, *The risk of harm to young children in institutional care*, Save the Children 2009
2. Short films of Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University '*Three Core Concepts in Early Development*',
3. G. Mulheir and K. Browne, *De-Institutionalising and Transforming Children's Services: A Guide to Good Practice*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2007.
4. *Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care*, European Expert Group, November 2012
5. *Toolkit on the Use of European Union Funds for the Transition from Institutional to Community Based Care*, European Expert Group, June 2014
6. *Deinstitutionalisation Myth Buster*, Eurochild & HHC, October 2012.
7. Reports from external evaluation of HHC's closures of the institutions for babies in Bulgaria, Know How Centre for Alternative care for Children, New Bulgarian University, 2012, 2013, 2014
8. The film "*To be a parent*", HHC-Equilibrium
9. The booklet "*Personal diary of the mother and baby*", Equilibrium
10. A publication on ACTIVE family support by HHC - Bulgaria
11. Statistical analyses of the invested resources, the price of support per child and the achieved results – external evaluation report on the cost of ACTIVE family support. This proves the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of work done for prevention, reintegration and support of foster care for young children and children with development problems.
12. UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
13. '*Deinstitutionalisation and Quality alternative Care – Lessons learned and the way forward*', Eurochild & HHC, October 2012

14. *'DI Myth Buster', Eurochild & HHC, October 2012*
15. The film *"Special foster parents for special children"*, HHC-Equilibrium
16. The film *'Transforming lives'* about the closure of the first institution for babies in Bulgaria, HHC-Equilibrium
17. National strategic documents concerning deinstitutionalisation
18. Information about deinstitutionalisation projects – ongoing and forthcoming
19. Code of operation of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Deinstitutionalisation
20. Sue Gerhardt, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain*

Key success factors of the RCMD

- Strategic positioning
- Leadership of district governor or his deputies who has the power to summon and hold accountable all needed stakeholders
 - Personal and motivated participation of heads of institutions or authorised experts
 - Inter-agency coordination: faster decisions/better decisions
 - Mutual trust in each other's expertise with the child in focus – sense of shared mission
 - Guidance on operating rules and procedures but emphasis on minimal bureaucracy
 - Training that changes values and attitudes: understanding the importance of child-family relationship; awareness of community resources
 - Personal contact with the family challenges stereotypes
 - Successful resolution of cases is very motivating
 - Involving the community in crisis support and restoring community values such as care for the most vulnerable members
 - NGO with expertise and flexible resources for family support as a catalyst of the process

External evaluator's view

*'This is a model that **invests in people**. ...HHC maximises the potential of DI to go beyond the care for children at risk and to create a new culture of hope and care for all the children and adults in any community.'*

(Galina Markova PhD – Know How Centre for Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University)

Scaling up

State Agency for Child Protection and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy have recognised the model as effective method for gate-keeping & reintegration and it has been scaled up at national level by HHC with support from central government.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Lyudmil Stefanov

A survey of the attitudes of the RCMD participants towards the deinstitutionalisation process

OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

The short survey that is presented here was conducted by the author in response to a specific request from HHC-BG. It contains twenty-five statements to which respondents have to record their level of agreement/disagreement. The study was focused on identifying the change in attitude towards the deinstitutionalisation process. The target group of the study comprised those participants in the RCMDs that were at the time operating in seven regional capitals.

The aim of the survey was to determine the following:

- What are the attitudes of the members of the RCMD towards the process of deinstitutionalisation that is ongoing in Bulgaria?

- What are their attitudes towards their own participation in this process as leaders and representatives of different institutions?

-How have these attitudes evolved from the point of creating the RCMDs in 2012, undertaking the training seminars presented in the previous chapter (largely 2013), and after the participants in the RCMDs have started the process of collective decision making and problem solving?

Here we will present the development of the attitudes of the participants in the survey only in relation to two key questions, concerning the ideology itself of the deinstitutionalisation process and the attitude towards families that have left or are contemplating leaving their children in an institution. The whole analyses of the survey can be found on the website of Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria.

CHANGES IN THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR CHILDREN

The investigation of this basic aspect of the attitude of the members of the RCMD towards deinstitutionalisation was achieved mostly by comparing the analysing the results for question №13 (see the diagram below). Arguably, this statement contains the most explicit and provocative formulation of the totalitarian understanding that people with disabilities, abandoned children, those who are suffering medically or psychologically should be kept away from the

eyes of the healthy and “normal” people so as not to disturb their emotional comfort.

Responses are recorded on a scale from 1 to 5

- 1 I disagree totally
- 2 I tend to disagree
- 3 It's hard for me to say (neutrality)
- 4 I tend to agree
- 5 I agree totally

These are the results of comparing of the answers provided during the two phases of the survey, the first undertaken in the latter part of 2012 and the second during the summer of 2013:

Question 13	End of 2012	Summer 2013
Society is benefited by the institutions because the children that are accommodated there would have a negative effect on the emotional state of healthy people.	Plovdiv – 2,18 Ruse – 2,11 Gabrovo – 1,7 Pernik – 1,72 Pazardjik – 1,94 Montana – 1,25 Targovishte – 1,47	Plovdiv – 1,75 Ruse – 1,4 Gabrovo – 1,5 Pernik – 1,2 Pazardjik – 1,15 Montana – 1,1 Targovishte – 1,2

We can note with satisfaction the fact that the participants in the RCMD have started to reject with much greater conviction the idea that society has to be spared from the sight of sick and suffering children, and that for this purpose the institutions can “help” us by keeping them in isolation.

In number values the change in all regions is positive. According to the way in which our measurement scale is set, the lowest possible rating is 1. This would reflect the case in which absolutely all of the participants in the survey have answered with an affirmative “I disagree totally”. As we can see in the table, the score for Montana has gone from 1,25 to 1,1; Pazardjik from 1,94 to 1,15; Pernik from 1,72 to 1,2; Gabrovo from 1,7 to 1,5; Ruse from 2,11 to 1,4; Plovdiv from 2,18 to 1,75. The established decreases of half a unit on a five unit scale are of great significance. The average scores being close to 1 means that the majority of the participants reject the idea with great determination.

This means that for almost all participants in the survey, the idea to isolate children in institutions so as not to upset healthy people is something they cannot agree with and, over the duration of the RCMD actions, this attitude has solidified within the total group interviewed. In other words, as a result of their work in the RCMD and the training seminars, the participants are now more confident of the opinion that the children from homes have a place at the centre of public attention.

The comparative results- 2012 versus 2013 – suggest that collaborative work undertaken in the context of the RCMD and associated trainings help shape the attitudes of participants and increase conviction. This increase in

conviction can be interpreted as a positive contributory factor to the development of a humane attitudes towards children from the institutions and their families accepting them as equal members of society and worthy of public attention.

CHANGES IN THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FAMILIES

The answers to question №3 presented below show how the attitude of the representatives of the RCMD towards families, whose children are raised in institutions, has changed. Work on prevention of abandonment and reintegration, supporting families to care for their children instead of leaving them to the institutions, is hardly likely to be effective if RCMD members sustain a level of scepticism concerning the desire of these families to care for their own children.

In the table shown below it is evident that on this issue the changes are also positive and statistically significant.

Question №3	End of 2012	Summer 2013
The families whose children live in institutions show readiness to care for them with minimum support.	Plovdiv – 2,40	Plovdiv – 2,95
	Ruse – 2,83	Ruse – 3,24
	Gabrovo – 2,90	Gabrovo – 3,27
	Pernik – 2,81	Pernik – 3,35
	Pazardjik – 3	Pazardjik – 3,26
	Montana – 2,91	Montana – 3,40
	Targovishte – 2,59	Targovishte – 3,05

With question №3 it is as if we ask the participants: “According to you, what sort of people are those who, at a certain moment, decide to abandon their children in institutions?” From the answer to this question, we get to know the extent to which the participants are inclined to negatively stereotype these people. As you can see from the table, there was a slight tendency towards the negative in six out of the seven regions.

From the summarised results for 2013, we can see how radically this attitude has changed and it seems totally reasonable to attribute this change to the experience of RCMD involvement - training sessions, coordinated work on specific cases and direct contact with specific families who actually attended the meetings. The movement in attitudes suggests a deeper motivation for conducting the new policy for deinstitutionalisation and greater empathy towards vulnerable families.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lyudmil Stefanov

The value of the parents and family

THE FAMILY AS A SYSTEM

The value, status and irreplaceable contribution of the family and parents in the life of every child can be understood very well from the paradigm of seeing the family as an interconnected system with the interconnections linking generations.

Viewing the family as a system is linked to the studies and practice of many prominent psychologists and psychotherapists, such as Gregory Bateson, Virginia Satir, Salvador Minuchin.

In this book we will attend to the ideas of the great German psychotherapist, philosopher and humanist Bert Hellinger, the creator of the therapeutic method called “family constellations”.

The study and practice of Hellinger provided the value system for the first module of the training we did with the representatives of the RCMD during the period 2012-2013.

In the way that the stars in the universe are grouped together to form constellations, so are the members of a family connected. These connections are determined by destiny and are unbreakable. They are exhibited through generations, often without people realising that with their behavior and life choices they are following models that are inherited from their family ancestors. The life of every person is determined by his family and the members of the family group that belong to it.

THE “FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE”

Hellinger’s “family constellations” method has won the hearts and imaginations of many people around the world because of the idea of the “field of knowledge” and the power it has over all of us. The phenomenon was understood before Hellinger. It was used in the work of other therapists before him, such as Virginia Satir with her “family sculptures”. Hellinger himself mentions certain predecessors that enabled him to understand the phenomenon—the family therapists Thea Schönfelder, Ruth McClendon and Lesley Caddis. It is related to many traditional medical and religious practices, used throughout the centuries.

How does this phenomenon display itself in practical terms? During a group session the facilitator encourages the client, who is sharing a personal or organisation problem, to arrange in the middle of the circle participants from the

group, who will represent the people related to the problem. During the arrangement the client stands behind the participant, placed his hands on his back and leads him to the place that he determines. He intuitively decides what distance to leave between the people, the direction each faces etc.

This procedure unleashes the action of the phenomenon that we are speaking about. It turns out that when placed in the field, all the participants start to experience the same feelings as those they are representing. Most often the clients are amazed by the effect that they experience. With their behavior, movements, posture, with their entire presence, the representatives look absolutely connected to what the mother, father, children, grandmother or grandfather are in real life. In this way he senses for himself the truth about his family system, without interpretations or explanations.

One of the attempts to research and describe the physical forces that shape this phenomenon belongs to the English scholar Rupert Sheldrake. He speaks about them in his book "Seven Experiments that Could Change the World" (Sofia, 2002, *Bulgarian edition*).

USING THE POWER OF THE FIELD IN THE TRAININGS OF THE RCMD

During the seminars with the representatives of the RCMD we used the fact that the power of the field is also displayed when the people represent functional roles. This is especially relevant in the so called "organisational constellations", when representatives of abstract roles can be taken out in the field, such as: the management of the organization, the competition, the clients...

In our case in the work with the RCMD, during the training seminars and also during supervision, the group participants could directly experience the standard interaction between children, parents, representatives of institutions, adoptive and foster parents, socially disadvantaged families, etc.

For the people that were attending these demonstrations the impact was especially exciting. They were left without a hint of doubt regarding what the children experience when any representative of an institution or the foster parent doesn't respect their parents (which is a standard situation, especially if the parents are Roma!) In this way the seminars were directly impacting the value system and feelings of the participants. Many of them shared afterwards: "The environment was like in a religious temple, as if during some sacred ritual. The truth became prominent to everybody and nobody could deny it."

GENERAL IDEA OF THE FAMILY AS A SYSTEM

The "family constellations" method reveals the deep interaction that exists between the people from a family system. When this interaction becomes clear for the representatives of the RCMD in the seminars that we facilitate it has a deep effect on their understanding of the irreplaceable contribution and value of the family and parents. This realization of values makes them highly empathetic towards the beneficiaries of the deinstitutionalisation process and its philosophy.

To identify this deep interaction, Hellinger and his followers use phrases like **family soul** or **family conscience**. One of the main aspects of life, which the constellations show to the client, is the so-called **system entanglement**. It is expressed by the fact that very often the client has certain suffering and symptoms because he is deeply attached to another person in the family system even one who is from a previous generation. Hellinger shows in his work that usually the main reason for this link is the fact that this predecessor has been forgotten or derogated by the family.

With the intervention of the therapist the next step is taken. In this second step the therapist changes the arrangement of the participants and gives them key phrases which they pronounce to each other. In this way the proper picture of the interaction between the family members is gradually reached. The client carries this with himself and it leads to positive transformations in his life.

RESILIENCE: YES, BUT TRACES REMAIN!

In psychological practice, there are numerous cases of people who as children have experienced heavy blows from fate and despite everything have succeeded in life. This seeming resilience among certain individuals who have grown up without parents, on the street, in institutions or even in concentration camps and, nevertheless, have achieved a great deal as adults creates difficulties for psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers who subscribe to a view based on childhood determination - the trauma from childhood reveals itself during the entire life and limits a person's life potential.

To describe the inner force or capacity that sustains these "unbreakable children", the term "resilience" is used. Resilience means resistance to blows. Many studies have been made about the essence of the hidden resource that helps children to survive and push on in life. The authors of this research usually come to the conclusion that the impact of childhood trauma has been counteracted by human agents encountered later in life and circumstances that somehow compensate for the misery of childhood.

However, many commentators argue that, despite outward appearances that give the impression of resilience or inner strength, traces of trauma remain. Anne Ancelin Schützenberger writes: "The problem, though, is exhibited with the descendants of these children because the trauma that is passed on by the generations can be much stronger than the one that has been received personally." ("The Ancestor Syndrome". Colibri, 2014, *Bulgarian edition*)

The author quotes a study according to which the level of the steroid hormone cortisol, which is released during periods of stress, of the descendants of these "resilient" people is four times above normal. According to another study, cited by the same author, the children of the survivors of the Holocaust suffer three times more from post-traumatic stress than their parents, who have personally been in the death camps.

This helps confirm the legitimacy of the idea of “family soul”. It is apparent that, in our lives, we often suffer on the basis of the fates of people from previous generations because we are systemically connected to them.

In the context of social work we can understand the powerful significance of children being raised by their parents. By supporting the families to provide a home for their children, by working on prevention of abandonment, the RCMD works not only for the children themselves, but also for their descendants.

FAMILY RELIC (THE STORY OF THE FAMILY SOUL)

“We laugh at the story about grandfather’s axe – “This is my great grandfather’s axe and now I’m giving it to you, my boy” “But dad, it looks almost new.” “Well, my father replaced the handle and I replaced the blade.” However, unless such a sense of continuity between generations is woven into the fabric of society, there is no sense in trying to have rules or regulations apply in school, in the workplace or in the community in general. Organisations, including schools, create questionable orthodoxies that help to keep the organisation functional – it’s an amoral regime - but heads of families and community leaders create and sustain ethical codes “

(David Bisset, Chairman of Equilibrium: “Child participation – it’s Child’s Play” Ruse, 2010)

Here is an important question for consideration: Is it legitimate to say that it is the same axe as the one that was left by the great grandfather?

For the people who believe in the systemic understanding of the person, it is the same axe. The steel and wood are different, but the axe that contains the respect and honour for the great grandfather hasn’t changed in its essence. Furthermore, the changes have been made by a people bound by family ties. These are men who in every cell of their bodies carry parts of the great grandfather’s physical and spiritual presence. This is why the axe continues to be great grandfather’s axe.

BERT HELLINGER’S INSIGHTS AND THEIR APPLICATION IN LIFE

During his intensive work with groups and individual clients, Hellinger gradually reached an understanding of the main principles that govern family systems. He interprets these principles by calling them the Laws of Love. The Laws of Love that operate in families, relationships and also in organisations are three: The Law of Belonging, The Law of Hierarchy and the Law of Balance. Their influence can be discovered not only in the family systems, but in all human groups, teams and organisations.

Every breaking of these laws leads to sickness of the systems or its members, to suffering in the family or disintegration and loss of loyalty in the organisations.

The synthesised experience of Hellinger’s school of thought has had a very strong impact on the RCMD members during the seminars that HHC

provided. It has been used in the trainings to serve as the basis for the participants' motivation and their feeling about a very significant shared mission.

THE RCMD – WORKING BETWEEN TWO SYSTEMS

The work of the RCMD requires a high degree of awareness of the way in which the family system functions over and above an understanding of the influence of institutional interventions in the family.

The support for vulnerable families in need but targeted at children at risk becomes more effective when the representatives of the RCMD are led by the principles and values of the family system.

As we have already learnt from Chapter Two, the RCMDs themselves function according to the principles of the system. While solving complex cases, the alternatives that can be provided by all organisations in the relevant sphere are coordinated.

Here we review the fundamentals that govern the deep connections between the children and their parents. Acquainting the members of the RCMD with the principles underlying these connections leads them to rethink in depth the real basis for effective institutional support.

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CHAPTER SIX

Lyudmil Stefanov

The Law of Belonging and Respect to the Parents

Dialogue from a mentoring session involving Bert Hellinger:

Question from a social worker: Which of the two parents is it better for the child to stay with after the divorce?

Bert Hellinger: It is better for the children to stay with the parent who values and respects the other parent reflected in the child to a greater extent.

S.worker: But how do we tell which parent respects the other's part in the child more?

B.H.: This is seen immediately, and the parents know it themselves. If you ask the parents this question, it is enough simply to look at them carefully and you will immediately see which is the one who respect the other's part in the children more.

S.worker: But surely there is a flaw. What should we do with the children if the parents respect each other to an equal extent?

B.H.: What kind of objection is that? In such a case there would be no divorce.

FORMULATING THE LAW OF BELONGING

According to this law every person who is a member of a given family system, has the *right* to belong in it. Nobody can be excluded.

Despite his actions, despite his unfortunate personal fate, every person has the right to belong to the family. He might have committed a crime and be in prison, he might be a drug-addict or alcoholic, mentally ill, born with severe disabilities and sent for caring in a specialised healthcare facility etc. That doesn't change anything. The person has a place in the family and should be regarded and respected in his place by all other members of this family.

SYSTEM ENTANGLEMENT

If the Law of Belonging isn't applied with regard to a given person from the family system, if this person is rejected or forgotten, if he isn't spoken about or if he is treated with disrespect and contempt, in the next generation, a child might be born who will start to resemble him, to live his life, to do things with which to follow him in his fate. In the most severe cases, this mechanism leads to unrealised loss of identity and identification with the person from the past

generation. In this way the child becomes **entangled** with the fate of another person, whom he might not even know ever lived.

Among the people who we cannot exclude, first of all are the parents. Our respect and gratitude towards our parents, who have given life to us, represent a fundamental condition for our physical, emotional and spiritual development. If we disrespectfully criticize our parents for their behavior, if we are angry at them, if we reject what they have given to us, we may lose our capacity for personal realization, to fail in our undertakings, even to become ill physically and emotionally...

THE EMPTY CHAIR SYNDROME

In institutions and at school some children exhibit a certain style of strange behaviour. These children prefer to sit by themselves at the table or desk and have beside them an empty chair. The teachers and carers constantly move them to sit beside someone and naturally these people are guided by good intentions. The children should not become isolated and need to learn to socialize. But it soon turns out that they are again by themselves beside their empty chair. Indeed, they often pile the chair with their belongings, so that nobody takes it away from them.

Children with such behaviour can become victims of mockery and attack by their classmates, teachers or carers because of their eccentricity.

In **absolutely all such cases** the children that persistently keep beside them an empty chair are keeping it for a close person who is important for them and who has been lost or excluded from the family. This could be a father whom the mother has divorced and has later replaced with another man who the child has had to call "daddy". It could be a deceased mother or a mother that has spent her life in a psychiatric clinic meaning that the family almost never talks about her. It could be a twin brother or sister, who has lost his/her life too early, and who the family also never mentions so as not to be reminded of the pain that the loss has caused. In fact – in the empty chair always sits an important person with whom the child is bonded deep in his soul.

The empty chair syndrome is one of the common ways in which the Law of Belonging reveals itself in everyday lives. During the training seminars participants shared their personal experience and nearly all said they'd encountered such a child. They discovered with surprise the hidden motive behind the desire of different people to keep an empty chair beside them. This strengthened their respect for the power of the connections that link the members of a family system.

THE "GOOD ADULT"

Virginia Satir writes in her book "To Rediscover Family Harmony" (Sofia, 2000, Open Society, *Bulgarian edition*) that in order to develop well and harmoniously, the child needs the image of the "good adult".

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The good adult provides the child with the fundamental trust that when it is in danger it has somebody to turn to for support. The role of the good adult can be played by the neighbour, the doorkeeper, the policeman, the doctor or a stranger who passes through the child's life.

The seminars with the RCMD are usually attended by representatives of the Ministry of Interior (police departments). They often express regret when it comes to talking about the "good adult" because many parents, finding it hard to handle discipline in a given situation, use the figure of the policeman to scare the child -"Stop misbehaving! Do you see that policeman? I'll go and tell him to come!"

Potentially, on the basis of this fear, the child comes to misinterpret the protective role of the policeman in society. As long as the child holds this misconception, no policeman is likely to be sought by the child to fulfil the role of good adult.

It was valuable for the participants in the RCMD to identify themselves with the picture of the "good adult" for all children at risk and also the families they support. Adults also need to depend on the existence of good adults. Together with this, they could see inside the irreplaceable role that the parent plays for the child. The genuine good adult is, to some extent, a natural continuation of the parent. It is as if (s)he acts on behalf of the parent. He takes on parental, protective functions for the child while the parent isn't close by or isn't capable of supporting the child.

THE RISK OF THE "I WILL BE LIKE A FATHER TO YOU" ATTITUDE

"The greatest power always comes from our own family. If we manage to find the place for the child in its own family this is good for him/her, even if it seems to us that this family isn't good. But this is only our view. The child feels at home within its family

(*"The Law of Helping"*, Advice to a social worker. Bert Hellinger)

The child has a natural feeling of loyalty towards his/ her parents however they behave. This is why (s)he allows only a "good adult" to come close enough so as to act **on behalf** of the parents, and not somebody who excludes them and takes **their place**.

The work of professionals from the child protection system is full of situations in which they are propelled to think that the situation demands that they replace the real parents of the children. This is a very great temptation. Children may need protection from their parents who are negligent or abusive. In this way the professional appears in his/her own eyes as being greatly significant for the child that he/she is helping. "Such help is very pleasant for the helper and awful for whoever is being helped. In order to prevent these mistakes we have to strive towards work that not only comes from the heart, but also represents real art" (B. Hellinger)

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Here is an example with which we will show how the work of the professional is influenced by the way that he views the parents. It is about a boy of 13, whose father was convicted of a crime and was serving time in prison. During this time, an adult professional comes into the life of the boy (social worker, special pedagogue or psychologist – it doesn't matter) who is engaged with the boy and feels attached to him.

The professional feels sympathy for the child. From the whole of his heart he wishes to support him and help him find a positive path for his development, different from the father's path. This professional could have in his mind two different understandings of the triangle of interaction that is formed by the child, the father and himself. One way of understanding excludes the father, the other includes him. Let's try to intuitively understand how these different visions affect his work with the child and the chance of the child to have a different life path from his father.

When he has an excluding picture of the father, the professional never mentions him. He has the following internal monologue with an accent on pity: "The poor child! His father used to steal and they put him in jail. How could he do such a thing! This person doesn't deserve to have such a lovely child. Now I have to be like a father to him. I shouldn't let him become like his father. I have to direct him to study hard and learn a profession..." We need to remember that pity and empathy are not the same thing.

At first, this dialogue seems absolutely natural and as if it couldn't be any other way. But when there are such thoughts about the father, the professional creates an invisible wall between himself and the child. The child may feel a superficial connection, but at the same time, at a deeper level, he feels alienated. Led by the loyalty that every child has for his parents, whoever and whatever they are, the boy could himself start to steal. By doing this, he will recover the bond with his father through "blind love" which will be explained later.

It is even possible for the child to start regularly stealing from the professional himself who is caring for him. At the same time, respecting his good intentions, he will be filled with feelings of guilt. But with this stealing it is as if the child in revenging his father from the person who is excluding him.

In the second case, the professional works for the boy, but at the same time has a place in his heart for the father. He realizes how important this father is in the life of the son. He knows that the father's place is unique and that nobody can move him from there. Led by this view, sometimes he may ask the boy: "How is your father? Do you write letters to him? Did you speak to him during the visitation?" In the case, when the child is doing homework under his guidance, the professional may say: "You are a good student. Your father will probably be pleased to know this. You should tell him!" In this way the child feels that the status of his father isn't threatened. He can trust the professional without any concern and follow his guidance, without having the feeling that he is disregarding the loyalty, which every person owes to his father. And something else that shouldn't be underestimated: when the professional shows such an

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attitude, the child is free cry in front of him and to share with him how sad he feels about his father and how he misses him.

Figuratively speaking, in the first case when the father is excluded, the child feels internally compelled to show his loyalty to him by following him in his path (which could eventually lead him to prison!) And in the opposite case – when the father is respected and his status is acknowledged - the child has the feeling that this professional is acting with the blessing of the father and on his behalf. The child can be confident to trust him. He can allow this professional to lead him on the “right path” without losing the feeling of loyalty towards his father.

IN SOCIAL WORK WE CONSTANTLY WORK FOR THE EXCLUDED

The people working in the spheres of social work and child protection constantly work with families from which somebody is excluded. It could be children that have been left in an institution, adults left in a psychiatric clinic, families with members in prison, fathers and mother eliminated from the lives of the child for a whole variety of reasons.

As I have already said, there are two possible approaches for the protection system. In the first, we care only for the children who are excluded. We improve their material situation by investing in institutions so as to refurbish them, optimize the human resources and secure an adequate financial package for their operation.

Our organisation chooses the second way. We work for deinstitutionalisation, that is – the children removed from the family should be returned there, where they belong according to their natural origin. The institution is an incubator for people who have been excluded from the systems to which they belong. Working for prevention of exclusion or for renewed inclusion (reintegration), we direct our attention not only towards the child but towards the extended family. Not only have the children suffered, but the families have too. Our understanding of the approach that focuses on the family as a system tells us that, when the Law of Belonging is broken, future generations suffer.

HOW IS THE LAW OF BELONGING BROKEN?

One of the most common and fairly dramatic examples of the Law of Belonging being broken is seen during marital divorce. If the two partners separate with mutual respect and acknowledgement of the fact that they have created children together, towards whom they both have a commitment, then the divorce can be overcome with few lasting consequences.

But often the opposite happens: one of the two partners, being bitter and resentful towards the other person, decides to exclude that person from the life of the children and, by doing this, denies that parent’s right to belong. In this way, instead of ending the bad relationships, which is the purpose of the divorce, the relationship takes on a new form and develops with a new pernicious force.

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Experience shows that it is more common in such situations for the mother to try to exclude the father. If he was an alcoholic, for example, she would strongly criticise him for his lack of support and for squandering money on drink. She would feel betrayed and angry. Led by these feelings, she could forbid the children to see their father after the divorce and would want to be legally supported in this decision by depriving him of his parental rights. She may say the following things to the children: "I don't want you to speak about your father at all! For us", it's as if he is like dead! As if he doesn't exist!"

Often in life such relationships between former partners continue until the death of one of them because anger and hate sometimes connect people in a stronger way than love does. From such a destructive relationship based on anger people sometimes can't escape for several generations. (Think of the Montecchi and Cappelletti families in "Romeo and Juliet").

Inevitably, the hate between parents is harmful and dangerous for the child. Let us see how Hellinger explains the mechanism by which it drives this destructive process.

THE TWO TYPES OF CONSCIENCE

"One of my main discoveries is related to the way that conscience works. Figuratively speaking, I returned conscience from the sky to the ground. Because I could see that conscience represents an instinct, instead of something spiritual." (B. Hellinger, "Happiness that Remains")

In the case described above, the **personal conscience** of the mother is clean. She thinks that, since the ex-husband hasn't improved, has caused her suffering, hasn't performed his duties to the family, then he doesn't have the requisite dignity to be a father. That is why she will have a **clean conscience** while looking for all possibilities to eliminate him, to make him look bad for the children, to deprive him of the right to see them.

Here we can note the fact that whenever somebody uses the phrase: "I will do this with a clean conscience!" then this person is preparing to do some evil deed or do someone wrong. Let not forget the fact that terrorists, religious fanatics or those who fight against them act with a **clean conscience**. Led by this clean conscience of theirs, the two sides cause suffering to innocent people. When we say that we have a clean conscience when acting against someone, this means that we have internally dehumanized this person. We have placed ourselves superior to this person, giving him/her characteristics that make him less worthy than we are.

But as well as this personal conscience of the mother, which justifies her behaviour, there also exists a more superior, shared conscience. This is the so-called **family conscience** or the conscience of the family soul. This more superior conscience isn't concerned about who has done what to whom. It isn't led by such notions as good and bad, guilt and sin. It doesn't consider the subjective experiences of people, their mutual accusations and claims.

According to this conscience, every member of the family system has the irrevocable right to belong to it. On this basis, the attempted cancelation of the right of the father to belong cannot be accepted. Since he has played a part in the act of making the child, he has become irreplaceable for that child. He is a part of the child's family system forever.

BLIND LOVE

Let us consider how the child perceives the battle which the two parents are leading against each other. How does the child's behaviour adapt according to this superior family conscience, according to which, the father and the mother have the equal right to belong to the child's family system.

I'd like to remind you that the child always feels deeply within itself an equal loyalty towards both its parents. But, at the same time, the child lives with the mother and is fully dependent on her. The child couldn't even think of opposing her attitude towards the father. That is why the child will often agree with the mother and share her attitude towards her ex-husband. (S)he could even start to openly and demonstratively replicate the mother's anger, to speak against the father in front of her and even in front of other people. In this way, the child would try to reflect the mother's feelings and be loyal to her.

However, blind love for the father is led by the family conscience that requires the child to recover the father's place within the family by copying and repeating his behaviour.

In this case the inappropriate behaviour of the child is the way in which this child realises the connection with the father. That is why, according to Bert Hellinger, we should never ask ourselves why a child behaves badly. The child does it out of love. The question is to find out whom the love is aimed at.

THERAPY BY RECOVERY OF THE ONES REJECTED

What therapeutic intervention could help the child whose behaviour is guided by such blind love?

There is no better therapy than the truth. By the same token, there is nothing more destructive for human relationships than self-deception and lies. For this reason, the first step towards helping the child from our example, who is showing hatred for the father but is unconsciously following him, led by blind love, is to face reality.

Using the family constellation method, this admission of reality in the work with the family could be achieved when the representative of the child directs the following emancipating statement towards the father: "Father, I hate you only because of mum. I do it because of her."

Another positive step is taken if, in the process of the work, the mother manages to reconsider her attitude towards her ex-husband and "re-assemble" the picture which she carries of him in her soul. This could happen when she pronounces the following emancipating statements:

.....

The mother to the child: "This is your father. And there could be no better father for you. I chose him for you and together we created you with love."

If the mother forbids the child to communicate with the father, points to him as a bad example, being afraid that the child will receive the same vices, she actually pushes the child to show loyalty for the father in the only possible way: by being like him. On the other hand, if she perceives her ex-partner *as a father* and respects his irreplaceable place in her life and the life of their child, if she gives the child the freedom to love and respect the father, the child would have no need to be like him. The child would feel free to love him as a father, to feel empathy for him and to feel sorry about his alcohol dependency, while at the same time accepting what the father can give. That is – the child could love him not with **blind love**, but with open and healthy love.

It is purifying for the child, as well as the mother, for her to direct towards the father the following statements: "You are the father of my child. And I respect you as the father of my child."

Of course, it can be often seen that it is very difficult for the mother to pronounce such statements. They contradict the hostile attitude towards the ex-husband to which she has subjected her life. This truth also has to be admitted. Then the phrases from above would include the following qualification: "Even though it is very hard for me to say it, you are the father of my child. And I respect you as the father."

THE INSTITUTION'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FAMILY ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF BELONGING

To realise the fact that we can be deeply connected with a child only if we respect the belonging of the parents requires shifting to a higher spiritual level. This profound alteration in the personal value system can happen more easily if we experience some kind of catharsis. The working methods, based on the practice of Bert Hellinger, led the participants in our seminars to such internal transformations.

Let's admit that in our case transformation isn't easy. The parents and families whose problems the RCMD members have the professional obligation to resolve, as a rule, are people who are difficult to respect. Profoundly disadvantaged, often rejected and despised by society, they may, as individuals, do things that repel us or assault our value systems.

When speaking about Bulgaria, we need to take account of an important fact. The clients of social services and child protection departments are mostly of Roma origin, which adds an ethnic dimension to the attitude of the institutions' representatives.

For one reason or another, burdened by the weight of their personal fate, families have come to the decision to give up on raising their children at home (if they actually have a home!). They have abandoned them in Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children (HMSCCs). The temptation for such people to be demonized is considerable. For this reason, the following lines show the main

ideas and value benchmarks that we transmit to the RCMD representatives during our seminars.

So... what happens with the children that are being raised in an institution, by foster families or adoptive parents? What happens if the adults who have taken (professional) responsibility for their lives have an attitude of rejection, disregard and exclusion towards their parents?

We have already given sufficient examples from which we can see that when somebody rejects or speaks disrespectfully about a child's parents (and also about an adult's parents),(s)he thereby injures that person in the deepest possible way. Every one of us can come to the conclusion, that if we are insulted and attacked personally, the pain would be much easier to handle, than if our parents were insulted. Such an attitude, even if it is not voiced by us, would make us withdraw, form barriers, refuse contact or express anger.

CHILDREN, I RESPECT YOUR PARENTS! (DEMONSTRATION)

By using the force of the "field of knowledge" and elements drawn from the family constellation models, we can help the participants in the training seminars for the RCMDs to feel with their bodies and souls what it means for a representative of the institution to be disrespectful towards a child's parents.

For this purpose, we arrange the field in the centre of a circle formed by sitting group members. We elect representatives of two children from institutions who stand next to each other and, behind each child, stand his/her parents. In front of them we place a representative of the institution. He looks the children in the eyes and they look at him. The parents also face the representative of the institution.

The interaction between the representative of the institution and the children is undertaken twice in two different ways. In this way, the group experiences two different demonstrations.

During the **first demonstration** the representative of the institution addresses the children with the following statements:

« Children, your parents are unworthy people...

... They created you irresponsibly and then abandoned you in this institution.

... They don't care about you at all...

... Because of your parents your life could be ruined...»

These are words that reject and exclude the children's parents. We know from experience that these words reflect the real picture that the representatives of the institutions often have in their mind for the parents of the abandoned children. Such is the idea and such are the feelings that a large part of Bulgarian society feels for the parents of these children...

And so, after the representative of the institution has spoken these statements, comes the stage in which all the participants in the demonstration share how they feel, what they have felt within their bodies when hearing them.

.....

Here are expressions of the feelings and physical sensations that are mentioned most often:

From the representatives of the children: "When I heard these words I felt a chill in my body, as if a cold air was blowing; I wanted to get away, but there was nowhere to go; I felt sorry for my parents (*Note: feeling sorry for your own parents is an extremely destructive experience*); I felt anger and hatred towards the representatives of the institution (*while the statements were being made the adult playing the child had been clenching her fists, as if preparing to attack*)

From the representatives of the parents: "I became angry; How could he say that I don't care about my child? I felt sorry for the child; During the whole time I couldn't see the representative of the institution directly, I viewed him as if through the child. And when I heard what he said I felt that my child was lost; I felt guilty; I was angry that he was speaking about me in this way in front of the child, without knowing what my true situation had been."

From the representative of the institution: When I made these statements and looked at the children and parents, it was as if I was hit by a wave and my feet lost touch with the ground; I felt my heart beating; everybody was against me (*in one of the groups the representative of the institution started to back away, as if trying to escape*)

During the **second demonstration** with the same participants the statements are changed. They now convey respect and acknowledgement for the parents:

«- Children, I respect your parents...

...They gave life to you, but couldn't take care of you...

... That is why I will temporarily care for you...

... in the name of your parents...»

Here we see regard for the irreplaceable role of the parents in the life of the child, instead of exclusion.

And here are the feelings and physical sensations that are reported most often after the voicing of these words:

By the representatives of the children: "I felt a surge of energy, my body was engulfed by a warm wave; I wanted to go to the person from the institution and hug him"

By the representatives of the parents: "This time I felt somewhat calm for the child. I felt that she was in safe hands; I felt that my sorrow and suffering for the child was growing (*Let us note that this is fully natural. The parent is the person responsible for abandoning the child, whether it is a Roma mother aged 14, or is a woman, abandoned by her partner during pregnancy, or a father whose partner has committed adultery and he has stepped away from her and the child. There is nothing more understandable than the fact that this parent will - all his life - feel guilt and suffering for his/her abandoned child.*)"

By the representative of the institution: "I felt pleasant vibrations in my body; I was saying the right thing"

LIFE AND DEATH

Through the demonstration described above, the participants from the RCMD have managed to experience by the reactions of their own bodies what it means for the representative of the institution to exclude the parents of the child. The parents have a unique and irreplaceable place. They are the ones who create the child out of nothingness and set him/her on course in the river of life. Without them the child simply wouldn't exist.

Everyone who attacks another person's parents and is disrespectful of them, is actually conveying to that person a hidden message: "It would be better if you hadn't been born!" Or, more directly, has said: "I don't want you to exist, I want you to die!" That is why many people taking part in the role of representatives of a child in the demonstration I've described say that during the first performance they felt a chill in their body. This is actually the cold air of death.

And, on the other hand, by accepting and respecting the child's parents, the representatives of the RCMD accept the life of the child himself/herself as something valuable. Upon hearing the respectful message towards their parents, the representatives of the children feel pleasant vibrations and warmth inside their bodies. They receive and impulse to embrace the person from the institution who has voiced the message.

Whatever the child's parents are, for him/her they are the first and only ones. The connection with them comes through life. There is no way for another person to remove the parents from this unique position. And anyone who doesn't admit this truth with respect could only help the children and their families "formally", without genuine human connection

Learning to show authentic care for the child that has entered an institution or needs support helps the participants of the RCMD to make motivated, valued and effective interventions in the lives of the children and their families.

THANK YOU FOR GIVING BIRTH TO ME! THANK YOU FOR RAISING ME!

The situation with adoptive parents is similar. Adoption is an opportunity to give a chance to the children that have ended up in institutions. By following the ideas of the Law of Belonging, we can assume that if the adoptive family is dismissive and resentful towards the biological parents then it can't establish a good relationship with the child. Their gratitude towards those that have given life to the child is at the foundation of the opportunity for the adoptive parents to have real love for the child. Genuine love without impurities.

This can be played out in the same type of demonstration that, this time, includes representatives of an adoptive family. They stand in front of the children that they are going to adopt and the children's parents.

This demonstration is played in two stages and the first stage is as follows:

.....

The two adoptive parents stand in front of the children that they are preparing to adopt and the biological parents stand behind them. The adoptive parents address the children, rejecting their parents. This is how it looks:

The adoptive mother: "Children, your parents are unworthy people! They have abandoned you in an institution and don't care about you at all."

The adoptive father: "That's true, children. Because of your parents, your life could be ruined. And we are here to save you."

On the basis of these statements the children feel lost. They neither have a way back to their parents, who have abandoned them, nor towards the adoptive family. How many parents do they have in this situation? Not one.

During the second stage (accepting the parents), different things are said:

The adoptive mother: "Children, I respect your parents. They have given life to you but couldn't take care of you. And now we will take care of you. And we will always know that in your hearts you have a desire for your parents."

The adoptive father: "That's true, children. I am grateful to your parents for giving life to you."

Hearing these statements, the children impulsively move towards the adoptive family to hug them. At the same time, they feel a warmth from behind their backs, which is coming from the parents. How many parents do they have in this situation? Four.

For every person who has been adopted, there is a single way to reach inner fullness: he/she says in his soul to his/her parents: **"Thank you for giving life to me!"**, and to his adoptive parents: **"Thank you for raising me and protecting my life!"**

The demonstrations with adoptive parents and children show clearly that the chance for the child to reach this state of integrity becomes bigger if the adoptive parents find a place in their hearts for the child's parents; if they feel gratitude towards them for giving life to this child.

In real life, however, we can often encounter cases in which the adopters are resentful and jealous of the parents. In Bulgaria this problem is particularly difficult to overcome if the child's parents are of Roma origin. It is then even more likely for the adopters to place themselves higher above them, to neglect the key role of the parent in the fate of every person. By rejecting those who have given the child the most precious gift – life - they essentially reject the child itself. A deep relationship between them becomes impossible. No matter how well they may have been prepared for their role by professional counsellors, no matter how many books they may have read about the effective interaction between adopters and adopted children, nothing will help them. This happens because, at the base of human interaction, are not communication skills and practical abilities, but the internal picture of the other person that we carry in our souls. The irreplaceable and most important part of this picture is the attitude that we have towards his/her parents.

GRATITUDE INSTEAD OF CONDEMNATION OF THE MOTHER (DEMONSTRATION)

Having gratitude towards our parents instead of condemning them and searching for their shortcomings, is the basis on which we can build our lives as satisfied, healthy and successful people. This gratitude and respect for what they have given us creates the inner attitude for inclusion of the parents in our life in the appropriate manner. And this reflects the Law of Belonging.

Let us take as an example a mother who herself, has been raised in an institution. It is not uncommon for those working within coordination mechanisms to encounter such cases. The mother raised in an institution often doesn't have the internal resources to adequately care for her child. It is as if her soul is constantly drifting in search of her own parents who she has missed all her life. That is why she hasn't actually turned towards her child, but towards the parents for whom she longs.

Figuratively speaking, we could say that this mother hasn't received enough love and care and hasn't been emotionally "filled" by her parents. She was given by them to be raised in an institution. However, we can really give to our children only what we ourselves have received from our parents.

The child that is born to such a mother could often be angry with her. He simply doesn't feel acknowledged by his mother, and this is possibly the greatest source of suffering for any child.

Using the power of the field of knowledge during the seminars with the RCMD we placed representatives of the mother and the child in the field. They stood facing each other. However, the mother was looking somewhere far away, towards the parents who had left her to be raised in the home. In order to voice the internal dialogue between the child and the mother, the representative of the child stated the following words:

"Mother, I am very angry with you!

You haven't done enough for me.

I need you. Look at me!"

When we did this demonstration, we could see how the mother, to whom the statements were directed, felt. She is guilty and embarrassed. She stands tense, as if stuck to the ground, and can't move. These words can't bring her out of the daze and make her look at the child. Her "parental capacity" is crushed by the feeling of guilt and she is absolutely incapable of giving love and attention to her child.

And what about the child? She doesn't feel well either. Instead of respecting her mother, getting close to her, she is accusing, demanding, unsatisfied. It is clear that in this way the relationship between the mother and child is impaired, traumatizing and painful.

The child, though, could direct towards its mother another statement, full of gratitude. She could say to her mother:

“Mother, thank you for not giving me away”

These are the words the mother’s soul can’t disregard. They unleash love. The words of gratitude reflect the real status of the mother in the life of the child. With them, the child expresses her feelings towards this mother, who hasn’t simply given birth to her, but has also never physically abandoned her, despite the fact that it has been very hard for her to give something which she herself hasn’t been able to receive.

Upon hearing these words the mother reacts as if awakening from a dream. She is deeply touched by them and opens herself to the child for a hug.

CHILD OF VIOLENCE (SHARED CASE STUDY)

In all the seminars with people working in the social sector, the idea is to give directions for improving the effectiveness of their work. It, therefore, isn’t surprising that the participants often remember their most difficult cases in order to present them to be analysed. In this way it is as if they wish to challenge and put to the test the “theories” of the facilitator. This is especially true if these seminars include ideas that seem far-fetched and idealistic such as Hellinger’s system approach and Law of Love.

At the seminars with the RCMD this is exactly what happened. Here is an example of how a group has tried to disprove the correctness of the Law of Belonging, according to which every member of the family has the right to belong and the rightful place of the parents has to be respected if we as people from the supporting professions, wish to help the child.

In the case that is described below, it was as if the members were asking: “And how do we respect the right of belonging of these parents? When something so awful has happened between them?”

Here is the case itself:

“The child of a young woman has been placed in a HMSCC. Attempts to reintegrate the child and support the mother to raise the child at home are foundering. Every meeting and interaction with the mother causes problems.

She is a typical example of a ‘difficult client’. In the rare cases when she comes to the institution, arguments erupt between her and the staff. Staff members seek help from the director, psychologist, doctor on duty, but nobody can gain her respect and reduce the tension.

The question is: How do we work with this woman and her child M., a girl aged 2?”

During the discussion of the case, the facilitator naturally asked about the prehistory. The participant, very reluctantly, with a frown on her face and some resistance, but prompted by the people sitting beside her, shared the following:

“Actually this mother had become pregnant after being raped!”

While they listened to this story, which many of them already knew, a certain tension dominated the group. Their lips clenched, they started to swallow often and with difficulty, their bodies shuddered from an unpleasant spasm. They lifted their shoulders, as if to say: “There is nothing to be done! What law and

what sort of *belonging* could we respect?! In this case Hellinger's laws can't work!"

The facilitator proposed that everyone should experience the following short intervention during which the group kept their eyes closed:

"Close your eyes... and imagine that you see before you little M. ... Look at her... and let her look at you... And when you feel... that there is a bond between you... and that you now see her for real... say to her:

You were born in the way that is right for you"

When they heard this sentence, the participants in the seminar were startled. Initially some of them were even frightened, but they soon afterwards calmed down internally. Tears appeared in the eyes of some of the women. After a minute, several among the attending psychologists, pedagogues and social workers smiled, took out their pens and wrote down the sentence.

They realised that this sentence was part of the foundation. It is a specific application of the basic idea of accepting the parents and not to exclude them. This phrase builds the only possible picture that the people who were working with the child and her mother could have in order to be able to take care of them without inner resistance and barriers.

In the alternative case, they would be filled with a mixture of pity and fear. And pity, fear and horror are some of the strongest feeling that lead to rejection and exclusion of another person. By overcoming out pity and fear of the way in which the child was conceived, we now apply the first law of love: we give the person, who we are working with, the right to belong, of exist. By including its parents in her life, we accept the child for real. In this way we overcome the anxiety in the communication between us.

Actually, the sentence "***You were born in the way that is right for you"***, can be directed at a very wide group of children that the child protection units work with because, very often, in their conception and birth there is a mixture of disturbing prehistory and "shameful" circumstances - incest, sexual abuse, attempts for abortion, adultery, an affair... There is no circumstance related to a person's birth or the act with which his parents have created him, that allows us to exclude him and not give him the right to belong to the human world. If we do this, then we can't be of help to this person despite our good intentions and professional experience.

"You were born in the way that is right for you." With this sentence we make a significant step by returning to the child the right to exist. By doing this we accept the child as an equal being and representative of the human kind. Only after we have taken this step towards overcoming our own resistance, only after we have respected the right of the child to belong to humanity, the status of this mother and this father, we can do something significant which will help little M. her mother and others like them.

The next step is to work with the mother by placing the truth on the table, without avoiding it. We need to discuss with her the deep motives and experiences she has lived through that explain her resistance to taking the child home with her from the institution and motivate her to allow the little girl to be

.....

given for adoption. This conversation would be possible only if the truth about the child's origin is voiced and taken into account in a respectful way.

MOTHER, PLEASE GIVE ME YOUR BLESSING!
(a case of counter-transference in social work)

„Whoever has accepted his mother, he glows. He is loved and immediately attracts others. I immediately go to such a person, without any hesitation. I know that I will receive something from him.” /Bert Hellinger/

As you can see, it isn't easy to train a group of people that are from the child protection system and to talk about the need for respect towards the biological parents. This happens because the children's parents with which they work every day are not "people like us". These parents abandon their children, they don't take care for them. They are poor and desperate. Their behaviour often suggests they have already lost their parental feelings and instincts.

The reported cases of bad mothers are horrifying. In every such group you can hear a standard story of how these mothers come on Friday at the end of the work week, enter the room of the social worker and "throw" a baby on his desk with the words: "You take care of him! I can't anymore!" And the social worker has to resolve the problem when all his colleagues that he can rely on are all at home and the weekend is coming. Sometimes he even has to care for the child by himself during these two days.

"Why do they bring them exactly on Friday at the end of the week?" –the social work asks. "If they would bring them some other day it would be easier for us to react." The answer to the question is clear: because on Friday evening, right before the weekend, the crisis of these mothers is strongest. For the poor people the weekends are the two days when it is hardest to make a living. The people from whom they earn money by doing menial jobs, by begging or other ways are out of the towns and aren't accessible. However, they have to make a living every day because they live life on a hand-to-mouth basis. This means that on Friday afternoon the desperation and anger are so strong that the mother is ready to give up and leave the child in the hands of the state. Looked at from the mother's perspective, the Friday abandonment ritual is in "best interest of the child".

In this way every problem that the workers from the child protection system are faced with can find its explanation. The participants gradually become calmer and more accepting. Trust is strengthened. But in almost every training group or supervision group you can see a social worker who "doesn't soften". She stays connected to the feeling of hate and rejects these mothers.

The case of Betty is one such example. She is a social worker and during the supervision she stands out from the others because of her especially negative and gloomy presence. She constantly makes derogatory gestures and comments towards all biological mothers whose children are abandoned with foster parents or centres for temporary accommodation. She is also

disenchanted with the protection system, her bosses, and even of the fact that she had made the mistake of coming to the supervision where she was being told that it was necessary to respect the parents because they have given life to the child.

Having seen this, the facilitator made the following statement: “I understand how much these mothers annoy you. Would you tell us something more about your own mother?” At this question, Betty waved her hand with even greater disregard: “Oh, you’d better not ask about her!” Most of her colleagues that were present laughed, because she had been constantly telling them of the problems that she was having with her mother. Betty was aged 37 but had not yet created a family and didn’t have a lasting relationship. According to her, her mother was that kind of woman that constantly portrayed herself as a victim. “She constantly tells me how she has suffered all her life. She is always moaning about aches and pains, always ill and unhappy with the whole world. And I have to take care of her! That is why I never have time for a life of my own!”

The facilitator suggests that she herself is also constantly unhappy and it is as if the whole world has done her wrong, Betty immediately replies: “What should I be happy about? With the life that I am living.” Some of her colleagues smile discreetly.

Then the facilitator asked Betty to close her eyes for a moment.

Facilitator: The others may also close their eyes so that we can do a brief exercise together. (To Betty) Now imagine that your mother is in front of you. Maybe she comes from every cell of yours, because the mother is in every cell of ours, and she is as if materialised in front of you... You simply watch her... and now, when you see her clearly, tell her in your mind:

“Mother, I am like you. Exactly like you.

Please give me your blessing!”

After these words Betty needed to stay with her eyes closed for some more time. When she opened them and looked at the rest of her colleagues, a certain softness could be seen in her look. She is even smiling slightly.

Betty’s case is a typical example of counter-transference. When something is bothering her in her interaction with people from her family system that are obviously significant to her, the social worker transfers this attitude towards the people with whom she works.

It isn’t easy to work with children when you don’t accept your own mother. The problem here is again related to the Law of Belonging. When it is difficult for us to accept the right of belonging in our life of one of our own parents, maybe even both of them, even though the principles of Bert Hellinger may seem legitimate to us, this stops us from accepting the mothers of other people. Especially mothers like the ones with whose children the workers in the child protection system work with. And when you don’t accept somebody’s parents you cannot connect with that person. This idea, taken from Bert Hellinger’s philosophy, is now shared by the people that have attended the motivational seminars and supervisions of HHC – Bulgaria.

If you work in the social sphere you maybe know social workers who are tenthly unhappy and they make angry and disrespectful comments about their colleagues. They believe that the parents of the children at risk have no feelings and are not like normal people...In such cases it is always interesting to ask this person the following question: "What is your relationship with your own parents like?" And we usually come upon rejection, disregard and violation of the Law of Belonging. Accepting your own parents is maybe the most important step in the personal development of the people with supporting professions.

**THE DEADLY "REJECTION DECLARATION"
(CASE STUDY)**

During one of our training seminars a worker from the system for working with children without parental care- a nurse with more than 20 years of experience - shared the following story:

"It often happens for a child with severe disabilities to be accommodated in the HMSCC, after the mother has left it to be cared for. Pressure is put on her to sign a declaration allowing the child to be adopted. The woman doesn't want to do this and her resistance lasts for one, two, three years...

During this time the child is very unwell, between life and death. But we somehow manage to support it and it lives.

At a certain moment the mother gives up and agrees to sign the declaration. At that moment the child starts to deteriorate sharply and after a few days dies.

This isn't an isolated case. Such cases can be reported by many colleagues."

The nurse's closing statement was corroborated by stories heard during other HHC seminars, organised by HHC. It turned out that a really large number of personnel from the HMSCC could tell such stories.

Here again, we see confirmation of what can happen to the life and health of a child if her own mother denies her right to belong and excludes her. This is valid even for a child that has severe brain damage rendering it uncommunicative. The bond between mother and child, between the members of a family, is obviously achieved by something that is beyond our personal control.

THE LAW OF BELONGING IN ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS

As people managing and working in organisations, for the participants in the RCMD it was valuable to learn that the Law of Belonging works with full power in the organisational systems as well as in families. Among the people working in a certain organisation or establishment there is also invisible loyalty, which makes them empathetic towards each other. The effect of the **organisational conscience** is also viewed here. If somebody from the organisation is disregarded or treated unfairly, the whole system becomes "sick".

Here we can take an example which illustrates how, in Bulgaria, changes in personnel can be disturbingly frequent. The example touched the RCMD participants very deeply. They had many comments, which became part of the discussions during the seminars. Here is an example:

When a new political party wins the elections, naturally - in the place of the previous personnel - it hires its own supporters for the different positions. In itself this is something that happens in many countries. This is why those people who hold certain positions dependent on government know in advance that their job isn't forever. However, the salient question is how the dismissal will be handled. Will it involve public expression of respect and gratitude or something different? Let's see.....

At a certain agency of a Bulgarian ministry some of the old employees go to work a few days after the new government has come into office. They take out of their wallets the magnetic cards, which they have used until this moment to unlock the door and hold them to the card reader, but the door doesn't open. On the light board a message appears: "The card is invalid". This is how these people find out that they have been dismissed from work. In order to get to the HR department and receive their severance documents, they have to enter the building as outside visitors.

How does this deeply disrespectful gesture, this brutal exclusion, affect those that remain at work or the newcomers? They lose all of their loyalty towards this agency. Deep down in their souls they remain empathetic to their disregarded colleagues. In Bert Hellinger's words, they follow them internally. This keeps them from feeling connected to the mission and goals which the agency was created to fulfil. They stop thinking about public interest and start to undertake their responsibilities formally by simply waiting for the workday to end. They could even embrace corrupt practices. They have a sufficient moral alibi to do so. It is encapsulated in the subversive thought: "One day they will deactivate my card as well and simply throw me out! Why then shouldn't I use my opportunities while there is still time?"

We can see that through disregarding the Law of Belonging, the disrespectful attitude towards those who went before us (who had given their contribution to the organization) causes demoralisation throughout the whole system. From this example, we can think of countless examples of how the disregarding of those who have been before us poisons the atmosphere of Bulgarian public and political life and kills the natural idealism of our young people.

THE FORGOTTEN NUNS

The Law of Belonging is of particular importance when considering the creators of the organisation and what they stood for. The example given below is from the practice of the Dutch psychologist, consultant and organisational constellations specialist Jan Jacob Stam.

He was invited to work with a centre for social protection. The issue was that there was constant conflict arising between the management and employees. Some kind of unspoken resentfulness had enfolded the spirit of the organization - constant discontent coming from somewhere unknown.

When he questioned the managers about the history of the organisation, the consultant learned that it had been created some time ago by nuns, who had later withdrawn and transferred their activities to secular authorities. By using the system constellations method, Stam discovered that the new management had not only forgotten what these nuns stood for but was even supercilious and disrespectful towards them.

The constellation system doesn't tolerate such exclusion. In organisations, similar to families, operates the invisible **organisational conscience**, which requires the Law of Belonging to be regarded especially with regard to those who created the organisation in the first place. Without loyalty for the creators the organisation starts to fall apart. This rule is valid everywhere: in business and in the social sphere, in the governing of nations.

After the problem was realised by the management, on Stam's advice, senior managers visited the convent of the order that the nuns belonged to. They were warmly greeted by the reverend mother. She showed real interest towards everything that the organisation had achieved while being led by secular management. Soon afterwards, she returned the visit and met the employees. In this way, the creators of the organisation were honoured. Even a portrait of the previous reverend mother, who had personally created the organisation years ago, was put up in the boardroom.

These gestures had a "magical" effect on the working atmosphere in the organisation. The necessary mutual respect between the employees and the management appeared.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ludmil Stefanov

The Law of Order (hierarchy)

THE SYSTEMIC ORDER

One of the defining characteristics of being is that it unfolds over time. To put it differently, some things happen earlier, and some happen later. And the things that happen earlier have a natural ascendancy over the things that are “later”.

For example, in such simple everyday situations as waiting in line to buy tickets, we perceive as perfectly normal the fact that those who have come earlier will get the better seats. If we think about the value of historical figures, those leaders that have governed earlier are “founding figures” and that is why they stand higher in the hierarchy than those that have come after them. In this context for example, Khan Asparuh is the founder of the Bulgarian nation and for us his place in the hierarchy is highest in comparison with the place of any leader that has come after him.

According to this law, there is a similar hierarchy governing the members of the family system. Their status is determined by a natural order. Those that have entered the system earlier have ascendancy over those that have entered later.

In the family, the parents inevitably precede the children. They have founded the family. That is why they have a status advantage over the children. They stand higher in terms of hierarchy in the family system. But this status brings responsibilities.

The same is true about the order of connections. The first connection has ascendancy over future connections. This doesn't mean that the other connections are inferior or that the love in them is less. But for the next connection to be good, in order for it to function properly, it is necessary that we have ended the previous connection respectfully.

The law is valid in all spheres of social life. For example, the people that have come earlier in an organisation have ascendancy over the ones that have come later. And if someone that has come last is somehow privileged within the management, this is met with discontent from the others and they could lose their loyalty towards the organisation.

HOW CAN THIS LAW BE BROKEN?

Breaking the Law of Order, as we have already seen with the Law of Belonging, leads to illness and suffering for certain members of the system, as well as for the whole system.

Here are two common examples of this happening:

During conflict between the parents, it happens that one of them tries to lure a child onto her side (often a child of the opposite sex). In her efforts, she will speak against the other parent in front of the child, complain about him: "Look how stubborn your father is! He does whatever he wants!..." In this way this parent forces the child to take side in a conflict that concerns someone superior in status. This involves transferring to a higher position in the hierarchy than his rightful place. The child is young, but it is required to take part in the relationship of the grownups as the mother's ally.

Or something else can happen – the parent seeks compassion and support from the child and actually acts *like a child* in front of him/her. This happens most often when the parent herself hasn't felt enough support by her own parents during her childhood or has lost them very early.

In the two cases described, the family members aren't in their rightful places. The appropriate hierarchical order hasn't been kept. The child, instead of being on his own hierarchical level, has stepped up to the level of his parents and takes part in their relationship. Or even, as in the second case, has risen above them and provides them with the support which their own parents haven't given them. The child doesn't have the capacity to carry such a burden. He bends under the weight and suffers.

How could things get back to their rightful place? The son, whose mother seeks from him compassion and support in her fight with her partner and husband and complains to him about his father, could say: "Mum, I am only your child. You are old, and I am young."

The statement - "You are old and I am young" - points out the correct hierarchical order between children and parent, regardless of the child's actual age.

WHICH LAWS ARE BROKEN? (CASE STUDY)

At one of the seminars the following case was discussed:

"A woman aged 44 becomes pregnant from the man with whom she is living. She has two older children – two sons aged 25 and 23 -, who are from a previous marriage. The older children show strong disagreement for their mother to have the child. As a result of this pressure, the mother tries to perform an abortion by herself at home. As a result, the fetus is damaged and the child is born with severe physical disabilities which later affect its psychological development. After birth, the mother abandons the baby in a HMSCC. In the meantime, she also breaks up with the father of the abandoned child."

In this real case we see several violations of system laws. The first violation is of the system order and hierarchy because the older children interfere drastically and disrespectfully in decisions which the mother has the sole right to make. She stands hierarchically above them. They have received their lives from her as a gift. Therefore, the pressure from these grownup children on their mother, their pretension towards her, violates this hierarchy and leads to a serious conflict.

As a result of this disruption of hierarchy, the mother twice violates the Law of Belonging with regard to the baby. The first instance -when she tries to abort the child, the second instance - when she abandons the new-born in the institution.

With her actions, the mother also denounces the right of belonging of the child's father. According to Hellinger, "when a mother has an abortion, she aborts not only the child. She also aborts the child's father. And that is why after an abortion the relationship often falls apart."

What steps should the RCMD take with regard to caring for the abandoned child? Here we can ask ourselves the question: "After all that has been done to the child, would the mother still have the right to play the maternal role? Is it a good option to support her as the mother of this child? Could we consider reintegration in this case?"

As a response to this question two options were presented and reviewed for the group's consideration. Both were presented as illustrative demonstrations, so that everyone could feel what was happening between the mother and child at the soul level.

In the first case the mother stands before the child and says to it:

"I wanted to kill you!"

This appears to be one hundred percent true. And this truth has to be admitted. In this case, maybe if the child lived with its mother it would be burdened with experiencing initial horror and fear.

Another hypothesis is possible though: deep inside the mother hasn't wanted to kill the child, but has made these "attempts" in order to please her older children, giving in to their pressure. Then she would say to her child:

"I wanted you to live, but I hurt you and damaged you for your whole life. I am sorry!"

We see that this changes the perspective when thinking about reintegration. Without explaining and voicing the truth about the mother, without revealing the essence of her relationship with the child, no attempt to reintegrate the child with her would stand on firm ground.

The natural direction of work is to include the parent that has been excluded. That is, to search for the father and check the extent of his readiness and his resources to take on the care of the child. For the child, in this case, it can be said that it would be healthy for it to stay in the sphere of influence of the father and the father's family. This is especially true when taking into account that the mother and the child's half-brothers have actually impinged on the child's right to life.

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Only after this area of inquiry, follows the possibility of looking for adoptive parents, with the transitional step of foster care.

THE ROLE OF THE ADOPTIVE PARENT

I think we can comfortably claim that, from a practical perspective, adoptive parents occupy the position of the most important people in the care cycle as we would hope they *bring it to a conclusion*. However, in reality, it often happens that they don't respect the rightful places and contributions of prior care providers. In this way, they try to become not only the most important people in the child's life but also try to provide for themselves "one-and-only" status. This is an act of fundamental dishonesty because only the biological parents have this one-and-only status simply by virtue of being the life-givers. The decision to adopt a child in Bulgaria, (or anywhere in the world), is quite often made after years of unsuccessful attempts to conceive a child. It can also happen after the loss of a child.

In the first case, the adopters are inclined to seek to adopt a new-born and afterwards never mention the fact that the child is adopted. In this way, they somehow want to deceive themselves - they are the "one and only" and forget the pain and disappointment of their fruitless marriage. Alternatively, they are simply afraid of how this seemingly shocking truth would affect the child and its attitude towards them. And when they decide not to share this truth, it is the most rejecting attitude possible towards the biological parents and stands like a barrier between them and the child.

When a child is adopted by those who have lost their own child, the adopted child almost always loses its unique personal value. It has come into the family not because of the desire to fulfil the adult's potential for parenting, but to fill an empty space. In this case, we have infringement of the value of the parents' own child. At the level of the soul, the deceased child may still not have left the parents' home. When the newcomer inhabits her room, sleeps in her bed, the deceased child is, in a sense, also there and feels pushed into the corner. All this leads to great confusion and disrupts the feelings of the adoptive parents, as well as the adopted child. Overcoming this anguish of the soul requires continuous and serious therapeutic work with the family.

Often in his personal conversations with the candidates hoping to adopt who have lost a child, the psychologist from the social service is told that they constantly feel the presence of the child in their home: when they sit at the table, she is there; when they go to bed they hear her in their sleep; when they wake up they expect to see her in the corridor. With these accounts, it is as if they want to justify their desire for a new child because it will save them from these painful "hallucinations". But, in this case, it is reasonable for the psychologist to ask them the following question: "But have you asked your own deceased child whether she agrees with your decision to adopt a new child? If you met her in your souls and asked this question, what would be her reply?"

This “dialogue inside the soul” of the adoptive parents is really important for the status of the adopted child in the family. But we cannot know in advance what the result of this dialogue will be. How will the deceased child regard the adoption plans? However, this line of questioning can provide some clarity on the issue of whether there is real psychological space in the home of the candidates for adoption for the new child.

With good reason, Bert Hellinger in his work very often reveals the dangers that adoption hides. If the biological mother and father don’t want to or aren’t able to take care of the child, the most logical place for the child is with its grandparents, or with an aunt and uncle so that (s)he “stays in the clan”. “The child has the right not only to its parents, but to its extended family” – writes Hellinger in his book “The Laws of Love”.

I AM A BETTER PARENT!

The new deinstitutionalisation policy in Bulgaria clashes with the old ideas, inherited from the time of totalitarianism. Led by these old ideas, the representatives of different institutions (doctors, pedagogues, social workers) believe, that institutional care is provided by competent and educated professionals and with this type of care the government provides funding for medical care and other basic needs. For this reason, the institution stands disdainfully before the parent, especially if he or she is of Roma origin and socially disadvantaged, and tells him/her: “I am the better parent. I can take care of your child instead of you”.

One of the motives for this behaviour is linked to the desire to guarantee that institutions work at full capacity and continue to provide employment for the staff and high social status for the managers. Of course, the common excuse for claiming the superiority of institutional care is the stereotypical belief that the Roma don’t care about their children. According to the existing preconception, they give birth to lots of children because – being uneducated - they don’t use birth control and afterwards they don’t care what the fate of their children will be.

The experience of our organisation disproves this belief about the parental irresponsibility of the Roma that is widespread in Bulgarian society. Here is what Elena Petkova, HHC coordinator for Ruse region has reported during a public presentation:

“In Ruse, when the rumour spread that the home was going to be closed, the phones in our organization overheated. We were phoned every day by Roma parents whose children were accommodated there. They wanted to take them back. They were afraid that their children would be moved to the other side of the country and they wouldn’t be able to see them anymore. This proved something that we had actually known for a long time from our conversations with Roma parents. They actually do care about their children and love them as every parent does. But when some respected person, who isn’t just somebody but in fact a doctor, tells the mother that it is better for the child to be left in an institution, and especially if this child has health problems, the relatives decide to

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make this difficult step, being motivated by what they have been told about the child's best interest."

Here is another interesting statement made by Tsvetan Dimitrov, who worked on the closure of the home in Teteven, with which our organization started its work in Bulgaria in partnership with Equilibrium:

"It turned out that only announcing the fact that the home in Teteven was going to be closed seriously decreased the number of parents willing to abandon their children. Removing this possibility simply redirected the Roma towards the normal practice of raising their child within the family, instead of seeking alternative options. That is – exclusion of this possibility and ended the professional coercion for the children to be abandoned leads to the normalization of the parents' behaviour with regard to raising their own children."

**INSTITUTIONAL ARROGANCE
(DEMONSTRATIONAL EXERCISE)**

During the seminars with the RCMD we often heard voices saying: "Yes, but why then don't the parents that have abandoned their children in HMSCC go to see them afterwards? They don't care about them at all!"

These questions are again connected to the Law of Hierarchy. The institution has sufficient power to convince the socially disadvantaged parent that it will handle the parenting better. We could easily imagine that the parent feels subordinate when he/she enters the territory of the institution to "show concern" for the child during the visitation time that is determined by a strict schedule. In order to show this interaction between the parent of Roma origin and the staff of the institution we have created an exercise which operates like a live sculpture and shows the participants in the RCMD trainings what the deep process that happens during this meeting is like.

The exercise looks like this:

Two participants stand in the middle of the circle. They face each other at a distance of about two metres. One of them represents the institution staff member, the other, a mother who has come to see her child.

Beside each participant there is a cube about ten centimetres tall (for example two packets of copy paper) and an empty chair.

The two representatives stand face to face, looking at each other and waiting.

Then the facilitator addresses the representative of the institution:

- You are the representative of the institution and have many responsibilities. This woman has come here and is simply wasting your time. Look at her in a way that expresses this...

- You are at your working place and she is here just for a short while and doesn't belong here. This strengthens your position even more, so that you can step on these cubes and look down at her from above...

- Furthermore, you represent the institution, the government machine. Behind you, you have the substantial professional support of you colleagues,

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bosses and even bigger bosses. And to show this, you climb onto the chair and view this woman from even higher up.

Afterwards, the facilitator addresses the mother, who has come to see her child:

- You are not at home. This place is strange to you and you come here once every few months at the most. You are below him and you feel his domination. So sit down on the chair opposite him...

- You are also very poor. Your material capacity is negligible. It is quite possible that you ask the passers-by on the street for money so that you can feed yourself. So now sit on this cube like a beggar on the pavement.

- Furthermore you have abandoned your child and have failed as a mother. This makes you feel guilty. In order to express this guilt, while sitting on the pavement look downwards like a person who is staring at the ground.

This movement upwards of the representative of the institution - who is now raised on a pedestal - and movement downwards of the guilty parent graphically demonstrates the impossibility for interaction on equal terms when institutional arrogance prevails. The exercise gave the participants from the RCMD a visual presentation of the truth in life, that if we want a person to show himself as a responsible and caring adult, it is necessary to truly respect the fact that he is always the one-and-only from the child's perspective.

THE SOCIAL WORKER COMES LAST IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

A completely different interaction unfolds when the child is at home with his family and the social worker has gone there to act as a partner of the parents in caring for the child. Here again, the two sides of the interaction have a different level of wellbeing, but the social worker has gone to the home of his clients and the setting takes place on their territory. This equalizes to a great extent the positions of power.

When we speak about supporting and the people from the supporting professions, Bert Hellinger provides a very significant reminder related to the Law of Order. It concerns all the professionals that are working with the family: psychologists, pedagogues, social workers. If we provide professional support for the family then you are the last one who has entered the family system. Therefore, in the system order you are last and can't legitimately behave as if you are first and most important.

**CARRYING OTHER PEOPLE'S HARDSHIP
(SUPERVISION OF TWO CASES)**

The professional's feeling that he is the "better parent" is damaging for both the ones he is caring for and himself. This stepping over the boundary, this taking of a place that is more advanced in the family order than deserved, could cause problems in his inner life.

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When a professional feels overburdened by his work with the clients, when he himself bears their suffering, when he carries another person's pain for days, months and years and can't get rid of it, when he suffers from emotional burnout, this is usually connected to internal violation of the system order. It is as if he takes up too much space in the family system of his client. In the system order he doesn't place himself last, but rather towards the front. As we will see from the next two supervision cases, this causes, on the one hand, suffering for the professional, and, on the other, takes away part of the dignity of the person that he is supporting.

Here is the **first case** in brief and the work done using element of the family constellations method:

The person subject to supervisory support was a social worker attached to a HMSCC. Years ago, she had been obliged as part of her job to accompany mothers that were signing declarations of agreement for their children to be adopted (known by the name "rejection declarations") at a notary. This had been a temporary obligation, but it had turned out to be too difficult in a moral and emotional way for the social worker to handle.

In the process of reviewing cases she was reminded of the scenes that had affected her most strongly: crying mothers and their feeling of guilt. Especially harrowing for the social worker was the impression that these deeply suffering women were abandoned by their families to manage by themselves. That is why the worker had the feeling that the entire responsibility in this difficult situation, as well as all the options for supporting the women, fell upon her.

The feelings of helplessness and impotence were still alive for the worker.

The facilitator included the whole group in analysing the case.

As a first step the social worker sat beside the facilitator facing the rest of the group arranged in a semicircle. She had to imagine that before her were all those desperate women and say to them:

"Dear mothers, I don't want you to suffer. Your hardship is too heavy a burden for me!"

These statements provoked tears. They fully reflected the internal truth of the social worker and she could not disguise her anguish.

In their role the participants of the group, who were at this moment representing the mothers, could feel and understand what it was like for the mothers to hear these words. They didn't bring any relief for them. We even heard one of the "mothers" saying that these statements had made her feel an additional burden and shame. It was as if on top of the guilt of abandoning a child she had to carry the responsibility for the trauma of the social worker.

The group discussed whether it would be good if we could with some sort of magic wand really remove the pain and suffering of these mothers? The answer was: "No!" By taking away the suffering of these women we would automatically take away their dignity. The simple truth is that after making such a fateful decision - the decision to abandon your own child -, the women concerned can't in any way find an excuse and peace during their entire life. In this way, the

suffering becomes part of the mother’s dignity and a permanent characteristic of her personality.

We finished work on the case with an activity in which this social worker stood in front of several “mothers” from the group. Looking them in the eyes, the social worker told them:

“This pain will remain forever in your hearts... And now I leave with your pain and your families and go to my own family”

After which the social worker slowly walked away from the participants that represented these mothers.

In the **second case** we looked at the story told by a doctor who ran the risk of taking up the wrong position in the family system. Here is what she shared with the group:

At the start, the doctor mentioned the fact that she was currently working with a disabled child and even though she had years of experience in working with such children, she felt burdened in a strange way. For her, this was one of those cases which the professional takes home with them and involves members of their own family members. They can’t distance themselves and retain professional detachment.

To review the issue, we arranged in the middle of the circle a representative of the disabled child, and behind the child representatives of its mother and father, and behind them, in turn, their mothers and fathers (the child’s four grandparents). Thus, a supportive pyramid was formed for the child, composed of the people closest to it. The participants that formed the pyramid stood close to each other, so that the representative of the child could gently lean back on its parents and feel through them the whole supportive energy that came from the six adults behind the “child’s” back. In this position the “child” said she felt very good.

Then I suggested to a participant of the group to get up and represent the doctor who had raised the issue. I asked the representative of the doctor to find the right place for herself in this arrangement. The instructions that I gave her were:

„ Intuitively feel where the right place for you as a doctor is and stand there.”

After walking around the room briefly the representative of the doctor stood behind the child, in the row of the parents, and announced that she felt well there.

However, when I asked the other representatives how they felt (including the “child”), it turned out that the “child” didn’t feel good because she wanted to be able to see the “doctor”. All “grandparents” and the “father” started to step nervously from one leg to the other and wondered what the doctor was doing there among the people from the family. The “doctor” herself at one moment started to feel bad. She had the feeling that she was standing in the family pyramid as an outsider.

Afterwards I suggested to the “doctor” to move in front of the child, slightly to the side, as if not to block its way. She took her new place and spontaneously held hands with the child. The “child” was smiling happily. This was very good for her. The “father” and the grandparents also felt a relief and smiled at the new arrangement.

But for the “mother” things weren’t so good. She said that when the doctor had moved away from beside her (to the left) she had immediately felt a coldness and emptiness as if she had no longer anyone to lean against.

In this case, there was the desire of the “mother” for the “doctor” to take care of her as well. The “doctor” confirmed that she actually sensed this desire of the “mother”. Then the facilitator provided the following phrase for the representative of the doctor to say to the “mother”: “This is the right place for me. And you I leave in the hands of your husband and your parents.”

In this way, the “doctor” handed back responsibility to the “mother” and stood where she belonged.

During the supervision, the real doctor realized that her burden comes from the fact that she has been trying to meet the mother’s desire and support her psychologically, instead of the two of them being partners. She realized that her role was to partner the mother by creating a strategy for treatment, which the mother would fulfill and continue at home. It turned out that the unconscious step across boundaries had led the doctor to this burnout. She had been taking up too big a space in the family system of her patient.

**ONLY I CAN TAKE CARE OF YOU, DEAR FATHER!
(SUPERVISION OF A CASE WITH COUNTER-TRANSFERENCE)**

The work techniques used in the system approach of Bert Hellinger are especially effective when the people of the supporting professions experience counter-transference. We have counter-transference when the professional sees in the client with whom he is working an important person from his own life who has played an important role in his development and personal development. These are often people from his parents’ family, but they could also be from previous generations and can even include people that the professional has never met and never known about.

The signals that we have a case of counter-transference are most often obvious and easy to recognize. The professional could be telling of a case of a child that he is working with and the whole group will feel that he is somehow too involved with the fate of this child. He doesn’t find peace even in the evening after work and continues to worry about the child. Breaching confidentiality, he burdens his family with the problems of this child and even causes the irritation of his partner and children. In such cases, we can assume with reasonable certainty that behind this concern lies the feeling towards an important person from his own family environment.

Here is a typical example that has been reviewed during a training seminar in a HHC – Bulgaria project:

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G. is a social worker in a small provincial town. During the training she talks about problems in the case of a nine-year-old boy whose parents have died two years earlier in a car accident. Since the tragedy, the boy has been looked after by his maternal aunt. Normally G. subscribes to the idea that the best people to take care of a child who has been bereaved are members of the extended family. At the same time she claims that she can't trust the aunt at all and is constantly worried about the child's fate. "I have to take care of everything myself – says G. – And if it wasn't for my monitoring her she wouldn't take interest in the child." The aunt senses this mistrust and tries, if possible, to postpone the meetings with G. and home visits. There is growing animosity between the two women which negatively affects their interaction.

When asked by the facilitator about her concerns, G. doesn't have anything particular to say about the aunt's behaviour. Her explanations to the group sound very vague: "Well, you know! You can feel it when an adult is really concerned about the child. I can't recall anything particular now but when a person has been working in the protection system she develops an intuition which she can trust." The facilitator insists on giving examples showing the reason for her concern, but G. can't tell of anything significant that reveals neglect, a worrying attitude or lack of care.

Then the facilitator changes the direction of his questions towards G.:

Facilitator: Is there somebody close to you from your family who has had a similar fate to that of this child?

G.: What do you mean?

Facilitator: Someone who has lost his parents early, who has been abandoned by them or something similar?

G.: (after a pause) No, I don't recall.

(Meanwhile G. stares into the empty space before her, as if looking for somebody. Her look is very typical for work with this method. That is how the clients look when they are connecting in their souls with someone who is important for them, but at the same time they have an internal barrier for realising their connection with this person.)

Facilitator: I see that you are connecting with someone. Simply give yourself time and think! Which person close to you has lost his parents early?

G.: (as if startled from a dream) It's my father! His parents died and he was an orphan at the age of ten.

Facilitator: Then it is your father. (To the group) Now things become clear. Just imagine G.'s life! Probably when she was little she has often heard the story of her father who has lost his parents very early. This story is an important part of the family mythology. The father has probably been given as an example of how despite everything a person can always manage to cope and continue forward. But at the same time there was an emphasis on the hard life of the little orphan that was raised by relatives and never again found that love and warmth that his parents had given him. (To G.) Is that right? You have probably heard such stories many times.

G.: (nods in agreement and her eyes fill with tears)

Facilitator: (To the group) It is at first strange that it was so difficult for G. to recall a person who had - like the child - lost his parents early, and who has been raised by relatives. It is her father isn't it! She is absolutely familiar with the story. But in this situation her suffering for the father is so strong that G. has pushed it out of her consciousness. Like every child she has thought about what it would mean to her if she lost her own parents. And she has felt the same fear and hopelessness that her father had felt. (To G.) Actually, when you go to meet this child you carry this story inside you. That is where your resentment about the way that the aunt cares for comes from. You can't trust her because the fate of this child is something that you are deeply connected to. When you want to control closely the actions of this aunt so that you are sure that she will not show negligence, it is as if you are saying:

„Only I can take care of you, dear father!

And no other relative can do it better than me!”

This reviewed case of counter-transference is typical. Such situations can be seen in the work of many social workers. Here we can witness a double violation of the Law of Order. On one hand, the social worker comes last in the family system. She actually isn't inside the system. Her role is clearly official: to stay on the outside and help the system to manage with raising the child by mobilizing all the resources that is has. But when in this child the social worker sees her father, mother or other people from her own family that have had hard fates, she unconsciously tries to take a central place and control the whole caring process. Her trust in the resources of the family system is drastically reduced. Of course, the people that she is helping are unhappy about her trying to take this position. Pressure arises between them and the social worker. They view her as an intruder and try to avoid contact with her.

In addition, there is a violation of the Law of Order as regards of the social worker's place in the family that he comes from. We see a child that is trying to relieve the suffering of its father. That is – to take the place of his grandmother and grandfather. That is why in the therapy groups it is necessary for G. to hear from her father the following phrases: “My parents gave me everything necessary for me to handle life. And here – I have handled it. Then I met your mother and we together created you. You can't do anything for me. You are only a child! I have responsibilities towards you, not you towards me.

The many such examples of counter-transference in social work give us reason to claim that some social workers choose this profession because in their family systems there are people with hard fates: children that have lost their parent or refugees that have left their homeland. It is precisely these individuals that they are unconsciously trying to “help”. If they can't identify these counter-transferences, they feel as if they are the only saviours of the people that they work with. In this way they violate the Law of Order and feel inner resistance to looking for the resources within the family systems of their clients.

BACK SEAT MANAGEMENT

The representatives of the RCMD felt a particular satisfaction when they experienced the effect of the system laws in the context of organisational leadership. Among them, there were many people who had been building careers as managers. The management role had been defined in relation to the Law of Order. For them, it was interesting and educational to witness in a special demonstration that the leader of an organization is also subject to this law, according to which the last one to arrive is always *last* irrespective of his/her job status.

For the participants to fully understand this idea from the Law of Order, the facilitator provided the following demonstration:

“Imagine that all of you are employees of the Regional Administration (which a large part of them actually were). I am the new governor, chosen in the last elections. Most of you are meeting me for the first time. I bring you together for our first meeting and say: “Hello! My name is Peter Ivanov and I am the new governor. I have experience in private sector. I have studied Business Administration at Harvard for two semesters. I have finished a personal academic study named “Management of public processes in the new democracies of Eastern Europe”. This should help you realise that I know very well what effectiveness means. And that is – in the way that they understand it in America! That is why I have the ambition for us to become the most effective regional administration in the country. I am certain that we can achieve it. And I know how!”

This was a demonstration of a case, in which the person who had come in last wanted to stand at the front. The facilitator turned the people’s attention to what feelings and bodily reactions this bullish speech had provoked. Most of them were simply wondering which way to look. Some were staring at the ground and looked morose. There were a few people that were openly laughing and commenting on the pretentiousness of this person. Everyone was predicting a dark future for the Regional Administration.

Next, the participants experienced a distinctly different kind of personal introduction by the new governor:

“Hello! My name is Peter Ivanov and I am the new governor. I have experience in private sector. I have studied two semesters of Business Administration in Harvard. That is why I agreed to take this challenge. Meanwhile, I realize that I have no personal experience of how a regional administration operates. That is why I will rely a great deal on your experience. Among you here there are people whose professional career in the larger part has developed in this building. I will consult with them and consider their opinions. When I become familiar with the work I will make the necessary steps to apply what I have learned from Harvard and from doing business in the private sector. I believe that with your help I will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the regional administration.”

After this introduction, the participants said that they felt relaxed and looked forward to seeing what the first steps of this person would be.

On the basis of this demonstration the participants from the RCMD could appreciate the idea of the Law of Order.

They realised that the law of the system order gives different opportunities to the leader depending on his position. If he has been working in the organisation for years, has travelled the way from the lower levels of hierarchy and has reached the top, then he knows the organization from the inside and has supporters. He has created his own vision for improving work, which he has shared countless times during personal conversations with his colleagues, before taking the leader position. That is why, figuratively speaking, he can take a position in front and “lead”.

But if the leader has come in last, then he takes up the last place in the system order. That is why it is necessary for him to initially engage with the people that have been in the organisation for a long time. In this way, he also gradually raises his status, moves to a higher position, finding support from the “veterans”. Figuratively speaking, this leader could be effective only if in the beginning he stood at the back and “pushed”. If he also tried to “lead” from the first day, he would violate the systems order. The employees would have the feeling that the new boss didn’t appreciate the achievements that they had made in their work before he showed up. As a result they would be disloyal to him and would perform their job responsibilities with passive aggression.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lyudmil Stefanov

The Law of Balance (between giving and receiving)

THE ESSENCE OF THE LAW OF BALANCE

Good connections, creative personal relationships, derive from the natural striving towards interpersonal exchange. For example the partners in a marriage constantly give to each other in all spheres of life: emotional, organizational, household, sexual, financial... The more intensive this exchange, the stronger the relationship. And the opposite – if the exchange is insignificant then the relationship weakens and the partners gradually distance themselves from one another.

When the man gives something to the woman and she takes it, this provokes in her a process of inner anxiety. She also wants to give something to her partner in order to reciprocate. Only when she does this does she relieve the tension of being a “receiver”. When receiving from the woman, however, the man also starts to feel this inner pressure and in turn wants to give something to create balance. In this way the husband and wife gradually enter a regime of mutual exchange which develops their relationship.

If the exchange is unequal, though, and one of the partners gives more and the other receives more, this leads to violation of the Law of Balance. Tension is created within the relationship and it could fall apart. That is why Hellinger calls the balance between giving and receiving the Law of Love.

THE LAW OF BALANCE PARADOX

The paradox here is that when the Law of Balance is violated, very often the person who leaves is the one who has been receiving more. It is hard for him to bear the situation which he has fallen into. He doesn't feel equal and decides to cease the relationship.

In these cases we hear complaints from the partner that has left the relationship such as: “I was suffocating in this relationship! I always felt that I was in second place.”

This applies to all kinds of relationships. Imagine that you have a friend who has started a successful business and his income has rapidly increased. He no longer has the previous financial limitations and starts constantly buying you drinks when you get together in restaurants and bars. If for you your friendship with this person is real and you don't maintain it for some selfish reason, this

would certainly cause you some discomfort. You may tell your friend how his largesse makes you feel. But if this tendency of showering money in your direction was to continue, you would gradually distance yourself from this person and his attempts to create a relationship with you in which you don't feel equal.

This isn't an appeal for a tit-for-tat arrangement of exchanging gifts of roughly equivalent price. It is a question of maintaining a sense of reciprocity and remaining aware that excessive generosity can demean the recipient.

Therefore, when we give it is good to consider: "Will my partner, client, friend or colleague be able to equalize the situation? Am I not giving him more than he is able to receive or more than he is willing to give me in return?"

For the representatives of the RCMD this idea obviously supported the principle that social support can give good results only if it is accompanied by requirements for the adults being supported to take concrete steps and accept responsibility.

THE ABILITY TO RECEIVE AND WILLINGNESS TO GIVE

"An African missionary was going to move to another part of the continent. In the morning before he was leaving, a person came to him who had travelled a huge distance on foot to give him some money as a present for his departure. The sum was the likes of one dollar and fifty cents.

The missionary understood that this person wanted to thank him. When some time ago he had been severely ill the missionary had gone several times to his village to treat him. He also knew that for this person one dollar and fifty cents was a very large sum of money. And that is why he already intended to refuse the present and give the man some money himself.

But at the last moment he thought a little, took the money and thanked the man."

/from Gunthard Weber "Two Types of Happiness"/

RULES FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXCHANGE

The Law of Balance has a different effect when the exchange between partners is positive and they exchange good things, compared to the case where one of the partners with his behaviour hurt the other one – that is, gives him something negative.

For the positive exchange, the rule is that it is good to return to our partner a little more than what he has given us. In this way on his behalf he develops the need to give again in order to equalise. So the partners enter into the spiral of positive exchange and their relationship develops upwards.

But in relationships it often happens that the partners hurt each other. How does the Law of Balance work in such a case? In this case, it is good for the damage to be balanced by some kind of compensation or for the partner that has caused the damage to be hurt as well. If the person who is hurt "forgives" or "forgets" what the other has done, then he occupies a higher position in the

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relationship. He becomes the better, more generous, bigger person. In this way the relationship falls apart because there is no longer equality between the partners.

But here the rule is the opposite of what works in the positive exchange. It is necessary, as Hellinger says, to: “Revenge with love”. That is – to hurt our partner less than he has hurt us. Or to want some kind of balancing compensation for the suffering that he has caused us. Because, otherwise, the relationship lapses into a spiral of growing damage.

Here is an indicative example:

“A man once shared at a therapy group that 15 years had passed since he got married and his wife was constantly angry with him. The reason for this was that a month after they had gotten married he had left for a six-week journey on a cruise ship with his parents, which had been planned a long time before. Since then, his wife constantly reminded him of this case. She would fall into bad moods for long periods, accompanied by angry outbursts. At every mistake or omission of his she ended up reminding him of this unfortunate journey.

When he heard what the problem was, the therapist suggested to him the following exercise in front of a group:

- Close your eyes... And imagine what good thing you could do for your wife that would make her feel happy and satisfied. But in this current situation, this gift will bring you only unhappiness. Maybe the same kind of unhappiness like the one your wife felt when, as a young bride, she had to wait for six weeks for you to return from the journey with your parents.”

When he heard this, the man thought long and hard. And gradually everyone saw how his face started to glow. He now knew what he had to do.

/from Gunthard Weber “Two Types of Happiness”/

**EXCEPTIONS FROM THE LAW OF BALANCE
(WHAT IS A “GIFT WITH TEETH”?)**

The Law of Balance (between giving and receiving applies) only to the relationships between equal partners (marriage partners, people in a relationship, friends, colleagues, business relationships). But between parents and children there is no such equality. The parents stand hierarchically above the children. That is why in the relationships between parents and children the giving is in one direction. The children can never return what they have received. They are always in debt to their parents. That is why they can easily be manipulated and may not feel free from their parents.

The natural and healthy order is that after time the children will give what they have received from their parents to their own children.

This rule is often broken. Here is what the French psychotherapist and researcher Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger writes on this topic in her book “The Ancestor Syndrome”(Sofia, 2014, Colibri, *Bulgarian edition*):

“There are many obsessive fathers and mothers who keep their child by a leash and constantly tell it: “I have sacrificed so much for you. Now you owe it to

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me.” For these children it is very difficult to separate from their parents and become mature adults. They feel constrained by obligations, similar to those that in Africa they call “*gifts with teeth*”. For example a son of a poor widow who has “starved in order to raise him” could feel obliged to stay always beside his mother, not to go out with friends and peers and not to get married while she is still alive.”

Other types of relationships exist in which the recipient cannot be realistically expected to give something in return for a gift (example with teachers and students). What we have received from our teachers we later give to other people that life brings our way. The things that we have learned at our workplace from the person who has been our mentor and given us his experience, after time, we pass on to the people who fill our positions. We can't return them to the mentor. This passing on of our knowledge and experience to the people that come after us is the most respectful way that we can show recognition for our teachers and mentors.”

LESS IS MORE

Using the paradoxical expression, “less is more”, we can describe a basic principle in social support for vulnerable families and children at risk. This principle is a direct confirmation of the Law of Balance. It is a principle within the model for ACTIVE family support, which HHC employs and presents to RCMD representatives in a special training module.

Giving support should be subject to the minimalist principle. The end goal is to prompt the families to find resources for handling the difficulties and challenges of parenting by themselves. With the temporary support, the families have the opportunity to overcome the difficulties. Something else: when providing support something should always be required in return. The parents should be given tasks (to find a job, to fix the roof of their house, to keep their home in good order and observe basic hygiene, etc.)

Only when this balance between giving and receiving is maintained, can the parents develop a fulfilling relationship with the supporting organization and emerge from their crises. If the giving is uncontrolled, if it doesn't require something in return, then there are two potential bad scenarios. The first one is that the supported families develop arrogance regarding the organization that is helping them. They become demanding, as if society owes them. The other scenario is that the supported family starts to feel totally dependent on the flow of assistance. In this way, they gradually turn into insufficient adults, into helpless children. This deforms and decreases their parental capacity.

Following below are some illustrative examples from the practice of the RCMD, which show the benefits of balanced support, as well as the damage caused by support that doesn't strictly require that the person who is being helped gives something in return and becomes active.

The cases are recounted by Kremena Stoyanova, HHC coordinator of for Plovdiv region:

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“M. is a young woman of Roma origin. For several years she has been a prostitute. During this time she has had three children. Her mother takes care of the first two, but she suffers real material poverty and has great difficulty with raising the children. Up to this moment M. hasn't shown any interest towards these children. She doesn't take care of them and claims that she simply doesn't know how.

The third child that is new-born is threatened by abandonment in a HMSCC. And here the RCMD intervened by having social workers and the HHC starting work together on prevention of abandonment. We provided material support to M., which consisted of only the most essential items: baby diapers and formula milk. M. also received from us guidance about responsible parenting and caring for a new-born.

M.'s change in attitude towards the child happened quite quickly. She developed an emotional connection and was delighted by the baby sounds and smiles.

The environment in her home started to change visibly. It became tidier, cleaner and more cosy.

Meanwhile, M. showed interest towards her other children that had been left in the care of the grandmother until now.

She managed to find herself a job. She washes carpets in a non-Roman neighbourhood. For us this is particularly pleasing, because M. is gradually escaping from the influence that certain people from the ghetto used to have on her.

Now M. shows interest in her children. She speaks about having to do everything possible for them to be able to study and have a chance for a better future.”

The next case shows convincingly how providing support hurriedly, without abiding by the Law of Balance, without strictly requiring the fulfilment of the commitments made can lead to the opposite effect.

“Immediately after V. gave birth to her baby, we received information in our office that she was intending to abandon it. We started work on prevention. We went to V.'s home and brought food and diapers for the baby. We gave the necessary instruction and explained to V. in detail what requirements we had for her, what she had to do for the environment at home, for the baby and for providing a means of living.

In this conversation we also wrote down everything that V. said that she needed in order to be able to take care of the child.

After a week, we went there again and brought the items that were described in the list. This included a truck with firewood for the winter. Unfortunately V. hadn't fulfilled any of the commitments that she had made. There was no improvement in the house, she hadn't registered in the employment office and she didn't provide the necessary attention and care for the child.

Despite this, we left everything that we had promised to bring. But by doing this our relationship with V. entered an endless circle. She started phoning

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me constantly and literally tried to black mail me. She wanted more and more help, with the threat that she would otherwise abandon the child. Some of the wood actually disappeared. It was probably sold for a small sum of money. And she started wanting more firewood from us.”

OK, BUT ONLY IF...!

It would be healthy for social service providers to answer with this short statement in many of the cases when parents in dire poverty turn to them for support. For example: “I want you to pay my water and electricity bills!” “Ok, but only if you register at the employment office and participate in the temporary employment programmes.”; “We need money to buy food for the child” “Ok, but only if we sit down together to form your monthly budget and then you comply with it”...

Here we will review a case that is typical and shows what the consequences are if this style of negotiation is disregarded. What does violating the Law of Balance (between giving and receiving) lead to?

“Information was received at the office of HHC-BG about a mother with two children. The father had left the family. The mother was living with her parents in dire straits. She was intending to leave the younger child at a HMSCC and give it for adoption.

The disadvantaged mother received a lot from the organization. She had a personal identity card produced (she didn’t have one at the start) by a fast-track procedure that is expensive so that the social support system could be activated more quickly. She was helped with the social support age so that – as a person in crisis - she didn’t have to wait for the normal long periods. Since she didn’t have breast milk, she was provided with food for the baby, a buggy, a cot...

All this was provided within a very short period and without strictly complying with the rule of setting the condition that the mother herself should also become active. And the negative results weren’t slow in coming. She started calling me constantly: “Hello, I don’t have any food” then “Hello I’ve finished the money, please pay my electricity bill” and “I’ll abandon the child. I can’t take it anymore!”

This mother could see that for me it was unacceptable for the child to be left in an institution. I did in fact work in an organisation whose mission was deinstitutionalisation. Eventually the feeling was created that I was the one who didn’t want the child to end up in an institution, not its own mother. It got to the point that I was literally being blackmailed and threatened that the child would be abandoned if I wasn’t constantly available and didn’t run to save the situation every time the mother called.”

The specific thing here is that we can see the consequences of violating two of the system laws formulated by Bert Hellinger: the Law of Balance and the Law of Order. Many of the problems in this case come from the fact that the social worker is strongly emotionally involved. She feels responsible for the child more than the mother does, even though the mother is present in the child’s life.

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It is obvious that the social worker needs to become more detached and to create a bigger distance, so that the mother can stand in first place and her responsibility for the child can gradually reveal itself.

CHAPTER NINE

Liudmil Stefanov

Dynamics of the family relationships in adoption and foster care

CONSTELLATION DURING A SUPERVISION (A CASE OF AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY)

The constellation explained below shows the deep reality that is in an adoptive family. As we have already seen, very often adoption is accompanied by violation of the Laws of Order and Belonging. The constellation shows how pointing out reality and recovering the proper order can shift the relationships between the people in the family towards more acceptance and peace. The supervision was held in CPD – Razgrad, as part of the HHC – Bulgaria programme for professional support for the workers in the CPDs.

Here we give an extract from the constellation with slight abbreviations:

Natalia /social worker/: Lately I have been working with a family that has adopted two sisters. There is much tension in the family. The children are nervous and aggressive. They want to run away from home. They don't behave well at school. They don't attend their classes. The relationship between the parents is also hostile and distant...

Facilitator: Do the parents have children of their own?

Natalia: They had a son, but years ago he has died in a car accident.

Facilitator: Ok, this information is enough for us to arrange a constellation for now. Now I will explain how this is done. You will choose representatives of the mother and father in the family and the two adopted children. After the representatives have stood up you will go behind every one of them and place them on the field by holding them by their shoulders in this way. This process takes place in full silence without any thought. You simply let your feet lead you without thinking about whose place is where...

(After these explanations Natalia makes the alignment. She places the representatives in a wide semicircle, with maximum space between them. First, the smaller sister, then the adoptive mother, the older sister and - at the end - the adoptive father. All of the representatives are looking outwards from the semicircle. They have their backs turned towards the middle of the circle and don't see each other.

Facilitator: (To the group) Look at this picture! They all have their backs turned towards the centre of the circle and they aren't looking at each other. If I had told Natalia to purposefully arrange a family where there is no connection between its members and they live in constant pressure, she would not have

done a better job! Now I will ask the representatives how they feel. How does the adoptive mother feel?

Adoptive mother: I don't feel anything. I am separated from everybody and I don't care about anybody.

Facilitator: (To the group) Often when someone claims that she doesn't feel anything there are strong feelings hidden behind that, which she keeps at a distance. (To the adoptive father) How is the adoptive father?

Adoptive father: I am reasonably calm. Only that from time to time something is gripping me by the throat.

Facilitator: (To the group) Notice that they are both looking down at the ground in the same direction. This means that their look is directed at someone who has died. In this case, the dead person could be no other than their son who has died in a traffic accident. That is why I will choose a representative for this son and will place him in the direction of their look behind this table. In this way we will symbolically show that he is no longer in the world of the living. (The facilitator places the representative behind a table, right in the direction in which the two parents are looking)

Facilitator: How is the little sister?

Little sister: I am indifferent.

Facilitator: Do you see that she is also looking downwards? (To Natalia) Maybe she has also suffered losses? Are her parents alive?

Natalia: I think that they are alive. But she lives with the feeling that her mother has died and that she has lost her.

Facilitator: Maybe that is why she is looking downwards. That is the direction in which she sees her mother. She may have experienced the grief of the separation, even if her mother is still alive. And how is the older sister?

Older sister: I am angry. And I feel tension in my hands.

Facilitator: (To the group) You saw the tension in her hands as well, didn't you? It can really be felt that she is angry. She is clenching and relaxing her fists as if preparing for a fight. When a child is that angry we can't expect that it will behave well in the family, that it will go to school with desire and take part in school life.

Facilitator: (To the representatives) Now you can move by following your own impulse for movement. Bear in mind that these are movements that come from deep within the soul. They are slow. Stand still at first and feel what the impulse that comes to you is like.

/For some time after these instructions the adoptive mother walks around within the circle and afterwards slowly goes behind the table beside her dead son. Upon seeing this, the adoptive father's legs start to shake and he wishes to sit on the chair behind him. The younger sister crosses the circle and stands in front of her sister, holding her by the hands/

Facilitator: You can see that the mother followed her son to the other world. That is her inner impulse. Also, the two sisters came together. (To the mother) Look at your son and tell him: "Since you died I have been thinking only of you."

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Mother: Since you died I have been thinking only of you.

Facilitator: If this is true, then tell him: "We tried to fill the emptiness without you and that is why we adopted these girls."

Mother: (With a sigh) We tried to fill the emptiness after you and we adopted these girls...

Facilitator: but this made the emptiness even greater.

Mother:(Nods a few times in agreement, sighs deeply and says through tears) ... but this made the emptiness even greater. (At this moment the father also starts to cry. Upon hearing this the two girls become tense and stiff.)

Facilitator: (To the group) Can you imagine what it is like for these girls? They were first abandoned by their parents. Then they were adopted, but in their souls they constantly feel that their role in the new family is to fill the emptiness left by someone's death. But in the end of all that the emptiness has become even greater! They have good reason to be aggressive and angry!

Facilitator: (Asks the representative of the dead son) How do you feel about this? What does it mean to you for your parents to adopt other children and bring them to their home? What do you feel towards these girls?

Son: I don't feel anything towards them. They are distant to me and it is as if they don't exist.

Facilitator: (To the two adopted sisters) I want to suggest to you to move further away from your adopter and stand over here. (He moves them about two metres away) Now I will place before you your two parents. (The facilitator chooses two representatives of the mother and father of the girls and places them in the centre of the circle. The girls stand facing them, with their backs turned towards the adoptive family.)

Older sister: (Reacts spontaneously) I don't want to see them! They make me more nervous than the others. I am very angry with them!

Facilitator: You will be able to tell them that after a minute. (To the mother/ How is the mother?

Mother: am very tense.

Facilitator: What does the father feel?

Father: Shame!

Facilitator: (To the older sister) Can you say to your parents: "You are our parents."

Older sister:(Angrily)I don't want them to be our parents!

Facilitator: I understand you, but there is nothing to be done. Such is reality... Ok, let us try something else. Tell them: "You gave us life, but afterwards you abandoned us. And I am very angry with you."

Older sister: You gave us life, but afterwards you abandoned us. And I am very angry with you! (To the facilitator) This is true and I feel some relief. But there is still a lot that is still inside me.

Facilitator: I understand. Let us then try another way. Tell them: Even though I am very mad at you, you are still our parents!

Older sister: Even though I am very mad at you, you are still our parents! (To the facilitator)That was better, but I still feel something burdening me.

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Facilitator: The situation is so severe that it is impossible for something not to remain.

Younger sister: (Spontaneously) That's true. I also feel a burden.

Facilitator: (To the mother) Look at your daughters. Can you tell them: "I am your mother. And the only thing that I was able to give you was life. Then I left you to be taken care of by others."

Mother: (With a sigh) I am your mother. And the only thing that I was able to give you was life. Then I left you to be taken care of by others.

Facilitator: Tell them also: "You have the right to be angry."

Mother: You have the right to be angry

Facilitator: The responsibility is entirely ours.

Mother: The responsibility is entirely ours.

Father: (Spontaneously) I feel awful!

Facilitator: (To the father) How else could you feel?! It is normal for you to feel awful. (To the adopters) How do you feel when listening to their dialogue?

Adopters: We feel somehow calmer... Yes, it is calmer...

Facilitator: (To the group) Speaking the truth always brings calm. I turn your attention to the fact that every time that we spoke a specific phrase which reflected reality, the representative would sigh with relief. This is the meaning of this work: to meet the truth face to face and for something in our family system to be relieved. And also – to form the correct picture. You see how much the picture changed compared to the beginning when nobody was looking at anybody and there was tension in the air. When the social worker realises the truths of this family it will be easier for her to feel the processes and find her correct place there.

Something else important: the two sisters felt certain relief from the meeting with their parents. But the parents themselves continue to feel burdened as in the beginning. And there is nothing that we can do. This also has reason: the parent to carry the burden and the child to be relieved. In the end the responsibility always falls to the parent. So now I will ask the two sisters to turn their backs to their parents and look at their adoptive family.

(The two sisters hesitate. The facilitator asks them again. And so their parents come to be situated about a metre behind their backs.)

Older sister:(Spontaneously) Now when I look at the people in front of me they immediately start to make me angry more than my parents.

The facilitator beckons the adopters to come closer and stand side by side in front of the girls. By doing this, adults and children start to look at each other.

Facilitator: I want to experiment. Will be better for me to move the girls' parent a little forward? Take a small step forward... How do the others experience the change?

The two girls: Nothing changed for us.

Adoptive father: I don't want them so close. If possible, I'd prefer for them to be gone.

Adoptive mother: I also became tense when they came closer.

Facilitator: Ok, then let's see what will happen if we move them far away, just like the adoptive mother wishes. Go to the door as if you have gone outside. (The parent move.)

Adoptive mother: Oh, no! This way I feel emptiness. Something important is missing.

Facilitator: (To the group) You see what a different attitude the adopters have towards the parents. It can be felt that they have a different attitude towards the adoption as well. Most likely the idea was given by the adoptive father and the adoptive mother doesn't have an inner connection to this. This is where an additional spark for conflict tension between them comes from...

Facilitator: (To the adoptive mother) Would you be able to tell the girls something?: Dear children! Your parents gave life to you, but they weren't able to take care of you. And that is why we will care for you.

Adoptive mother: No, no! I can't say "dear children"!

Facilitator: Ok, without that then. Look at them and say: Your parents gave life to you, but they weren't able to take care of you. And that is why we will care for you.

Adopted mother: (Half-heartedly) Your parents gave life to you, but they weren't able to take care of you. And that is why we will care for you.

Facilitator: even though I am already separated from life!

Adoptive mother: (With I sigh and tears in her eyes) ... even though I am already separated from life!

(The two girls nod their heads and show that they feel relieved by these words of the adoptive mother and feel compassion towards her.)

Facilitator: (To the adoptive father) I am thinking, what could you say to them? Could you tell them this? "Children, I have the strength and desire to take care of you."

Adoptive father: Children, I have the strength and desire to take care of you.

Facilitator: And could you add: ..."without wanting anything in return."

Adoptive father: No, the second thing I can't say.

Facilitator: In this case tell them: ..."and I know that as much as my care is important for you, so are you important to me."

Adoptive father: (Showing agreement) ... and I know that as much as my care is important for you, so are you important to me.

(Upon hearing this the girls relax even more.)

Facilitator: (To the group) Now the situation is quite changed. The people are more connected. Many truths were voiced and this led to lessening of the tension. The children are looking towards the adopters and they feel their parents somewhere far behind their backs. The dead son of the adopters was also respected. Now, as a last step, let Natalia join in (To Natalia) You are a social worker and you are working with this family. Feel where the right place for you is and take it.

(Natalia steps forward and after some brief hesitation stands behind the two children.)

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Facilitator: What is this like for the others?

Sisters: It is fine for us. We feel more secure when she is here.

Adoptive father: I also feel better in her presence. It is a support for my family.

Adoptive mother: For me, she is too much. It has become too much for me having her here.

Facilitator: (To Natalia) Does this reflect the real situation of your interaction with the family?

Natalia: Yes, absolutely.

Facilitator: We again see the contradiction inside the adoptive family. It is important for Natalia to bear it in mind while working with them... I suggest that we stop here. Come out of your roles.

THE GRATITUDE OF THE SUN AND THE MOON (CASE STUDY)

A great deal of research has been done and many books have been written about the connection between the adopted child and its biological parents. Even though it has been abandoned by them, the child still feels its connection with the people who have given it life and insists that they are acknowledged. This connection is particularly visible when, during work with the adopted child, symbols and art therapy techniques are used.

Here is an example:

K. was adopted when he was one year and nine months old. His parents are of Roma origin. Up to the moment of his adoption, he had lived in an institution. The adoptive mother takes him to weekly consultation because the child has difficulty adapting. He gets laughed at in school for being a "gypsy". He gets angry at this and is always in conflicts with the children. He has been diagnosed as "hyperactive". He has learning difficulty and a resource teacher supports him in class.

During one of the sessions, K. has been given the task to draw a large circle on a sheet of paper and, afterwards, to mark with small circles all the significant people in his life. Intriguingly, in his drawing, there are many significant people and they are all placed around the edge of the circle. There the largest circles signify "mum and dad" (the adopters). With many smaller circles he had indicated cousins, grandmothers, friends, teachers, children from the dance group etc.

The centre of the circle was empty and this has a strong impact on anyone who sees the drawing. All the people were placed around the edge. To the question: "Who is in the middle of the circle?" K. answered, without hesitation: "The Sun and Moon". After which he drew a sun and a moon in the centre of the circle. The practice of psychoanalysts shows that the Sun and Moon are powerful symbols of the mother and father. When, for example, somebody dreams of the Sun, it is, in fact, his father, and when he dreams of the Moon, it is his mother.

After he had drawn them in the centre of the circle, K. was asked the following question: "And what do the Sun and Moon say to your mother and father?" K. answered without hesitation: "They say: Thank you for taking care of our child. You are very good people."

In this touching reaction it can be seen that, in the child's soul, at an unconscious level all significant people are connected. And when we are working with adopted or abandoned children one of the main tasks is to help them see these connections.

THE DYNAMICS OF FOSTER FAMILIES (WHERE IS THE PROBLEM?)

By using the family constellation method we can research the dynamics of human relationships for educational purposes. This turns out to be something valuable in our training groups, so that we can see what lies beneath the surface when a family decide to take someone else's child into their home, becoming part of the foster family system.

Here we have presented the essence of the many demonstrations that we have done during our trainings, during which the energy of the field is used for educational purposes. These demonstrations resemble the following:

Facilitator: Now we will see the dynamics in the foster family when a child is placed in it. Let's choose four representatives - for the father, of the mother and of their two children. This is a typical Bulgarian family. First, these representatives will stand in a line, according to the Law of Order: starting from left to right, first the father, then the mother, the older sister and the younger sister.

(In Bulgaria, most of the participants in these groups are women and that is why we most often have to illustrate the dynamics with two sisters and a foster child that is also a girl.)

After the representatives are arranged in this way in the middle of the circle, the facilitator chooses another person from the group and places him in front of the family, two to-three metres away.

Facilitator: You are the representative of the foster child. Your parents can't take care of you. And I represent the child protection system and have brought you to this foster family. Our experts have investigated and approved the family. The parents have undergone training and now everyone awaits your arrival. Look at them carefully, take your time. Simply feel where the right place for you is in the family order and stand there!

(The foster child looks at the people from the family for some time and slowly and hesitantly walks towards them. She takes her place between the two children and starts to look around somewhat fearfully. The children reluctantly step aside to make room for her.)

Facilitator: (To the group) The foster child took its place between the children and that looks fully normal. Let us see how this affected the rest of the family. How does the older child feel?

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First child: Well, I'm not Ok like this. She separated me from my sister.

Facilitator: And how is the younger child?

Second child: I also don't like her standing between me and my sister.

Facilitator: How are the parents? How do you feel the situation?

Mother: For me it is neutral, I can't judge.

Father: For me it was OK like that. Why not let her play with the children. But now I see that the two girls don't like it, so she can't stay there. I think that it is better for her to come between us. The foster child needs more attention and support anyway.

The facilitator places the foster child between the two parents. The moment the child stands there the two children move aside and an empty space opens up between them and the parents.

Facilitator: (To the group) Did you see that movement? The moment I placed the foster child between the two parents, the two children moved aside. How are you? What is happening with you?

First child: It is awful like this. I even felt sick when I saw her standing between mother and father. It is as if we aren't their children.

Second child: I also felt very awful. Now I am holding my sisters hand because I have the feeling that she is the only person I have left.

Facilitator: (To the group) When we are placing a child in a foster family we have to have in mind these dynamics. From the very moment that the parents start to consider the possibility of becoming part of the foster care system their children start to get tense inside and start to ask themselves: "What is happening? Why do mother and father want to bring another child home? Aren't we enough for them?" In such a situation the children often look for the reason for this decision of the parents in themselves: "Obviously something isn't right with us! Well yes! My older sister is a teenager and she has started not to come home on time. I also make them angry and now they are looking for another child that has been left without parents and it will be better than me."

Let us consider now that when we placed the foster child between the two parents it is as if the children's darkest premonitions have come true. They have the feeling that the child-invader has become the most important thing in the family and that they have to be left without their parents' love because of it. This frightens the two sisters and they move away from the parents and at the same time grip strongly to each other. It is possible that these children starts get angry at their parents, to become aggressive, to get on badly at school. You can be sure that this internal dynamic is often met. For the foster parents it is a great challenge to explain to their own children the decision to become part of foster care. If they tell them, intending to calm them, that their motives are entirely financial and that this is a job like any other, then they risk their explanation becoming too pragmatic and even cynical, and to devalue their role as adults that have taken the responsibility for a child with a difficult fate. Then their children will become indifferent towards this child or will start to feel sorry for it. We see how difficult the dialogue is between the foster parents and their own children!

(To the foster child) Let us ask the foster child itself how does it feel?

Foster child: I am also not comfortable and I feel that I am not in the right place.

Facilitator: Ok, let us try a different position then. Stand between the parents and children. Space has opened here anyway after the two sister moved away. (After a pause) I see that there is again a reaction.

Mother: For me this is not alright. It is as if she has separated me from my children.

First child: (Angrily) I also can't agree with this. She has taken up the first place. Now I just feel like leaving the family, since she is standing in my place.

Facilitator: Ok, then. We have more options. (To the foster child) Move to be last in the line, after the younger sister. How is it now?

Father: (Spontaneously) Now she is so far away from me that I don't feel her at all. I have no contact.

Second child: Honestly speaking, I don't like it like this either. I am used to being the youngest and now she has taken my place. I don't want her to be as if the youngest.

Facilitator: Yes, that is true. There are advantages in being the youngest. And the younger sister doesn't want to give up this place to someone else.

First child: (Spontaneously) Now, when she has gone to the end of the line I feel guilty, as if I have exclude her.

Facilitator: This is also very realistic. She didn't let her stand in her place and now she is suffering and feels bad. For a child this can be very agonizing. (To the group) Well, what should we do now?

(During this the father is thinking deeply. He moves a step away and looks at the whole family.)

Facilitator: (To the group) Look at the father. He is watching from aside and looking for a better option. It is as if he is solving a chess problem. This is typical for the man's way of thinking. He has been until now most active in giving suggestions. (The group smiles at the father) Let us see what is happening with the father. (To the father) What is the right move?

Father: I know what has to be done. The only good solution is for the foster child to stay in the middle, and for us to stand in a circle around it.

Facilitator: Ok! Arrange the family in the way that you propose. (The father moves the foster child and then arranges around it his wife and two children, and in the end he himself takes his place in the circle)

Facilitator: (To the group after a short pause) We see immediate reactions. Well, how is it now?

Foster child: No, I simply can't bear it like this. It is now maybe worst for me. I am simply suffocating. They have all surrounded me and are staring at me. It is very awful to live with the idea that you are the problem.

Everyone else: No, it not alright like this. We don't see anything apart from the foster child. It is as if the rest of the world doesn't exist... We are also suffocating!

Facilitator: Ok, move some space apart so that you are not suffocating. (To the group) The people who are experienced in the social sphere, as well as the foster parents, can confirm how realistic the last picture is. The foster child comes in and life starts to evolve around it. This creates a precondition for the family to become self-capsulated and closed to the outside world. There are many foster families that feel exactly like this -: different and outside the world. This is unnerving and suffocating.

THE DYNAMICS OF FOSTER FAMILIES (WHERE IS THE SOLUTION?)

Facilitator: We see what the problem is. In the foster family, the dynamics are complicated. The family's own children feel depressed and threatened by exclusion. That is why we can often see how parents who have children of their own and have taken foster children in their care (or have adopted another child) lose their connection with their own children. According to Bert Hellinger's teaching, the only way for this problem to be resolved is for the foster families to acknowledge the parents of the foster child. Let us together see how this would change things.

(The facilitator chooses two representatives from the group and places them in front of the rest)

Facilitator: These are the parents of the foster child. (To the foster child) You come here and stand in front of your parents. (The child stands in front of its parents and together they look towards the people from the foster family) Turn around for a minute and look at them. These are your parents. They have given life to you and afterwards have had difficulty caring for you. They are maybe poor or sick. Maybe they are abroad earning money. Maybe one of them is dead... And now turn around again. Simply feel – your parents are behind you and together you are looking towards the foster family. (Pause) Now tell the people in the foster family: "These are my parents."

Foster child: These are my parents.

Facilitator: I am with you only temporarily.

Foster child: I am with you only temporarily.

Facilitator: How did all this affect the people from the foster family? How is the father?

Father: I feel compassion for these parents and I want to help them.

Facilitator: How is the mother?

Mother: Now, when the child's parents have come, it has created a fuller image. I have started somehow to understand it. Before, I was only wondering where its place was in our family.

Facilitator: Tell the foster child: "Now I see you."

Mother: Now I see you.

Facilitator: I see you and your parents.

Mother: I see you and your parents.

Facilitator: And how are the children?

Older child: Now I am calmer. When her parents came everything became clear to me. Up to this moment I was very tense. I felt her as an intruder who was going to take our parents from us.

Younger child: I am also alright. The child may come to us if mother and father have decided so.

Facilitator: (To the group) You see that now everything has come to its place. When the parents of the foster child have been acknowledged and seen by everyone in the foster family, peace comes. The children are calm and can accept the child as a friend and companion in the games. They know that it has parents of its own and won't take away their parents.

This can happen only if the foster parents view the foster child's own parents with respect and compassion. But, in reality, very often they reject them internally and say in front of the children things like: "We will take a child here with us because it doesn't have a mother and father!" or "There is a child that is very good and nice, but its parents don't want to take care of it." Hearing such expressions, the children imagine that they have to share their parents with this poor child who has no parents.

The foster child is viewed in a completely different way if the parents say about it: "This child has parents of its own who love it, but at the moment it is hard for them to take care of it. That is why it will live with us."

This demonstration shows us that respect towards the parents of the foster child is the only way for it to live relatively seamlessly in the home of the foster parents.

THE FOSTER FAMILY RESPECTS THE FATHER (A SHARED CASE FROM PRACTICE)

Here we will give an example of a real supervision, which shows the value of respect shown towards the biological parents of a child that is being raised in a foster family. The case was shared during work with the team of Equilibrium in Ruse as part of the HHC – Bulgaria supervision programme.

V. is a boy of Roma origin aged seven. For a year and a half, he has been living with his father, while his mother works in Spain so as to provide for the family.

For a year V. has been registered at the CPD and with the father's agreement, has been sent to a foster family. However, in this new family, the child doesn't feel happy. The foster parents also complain about his emotional reactions, his lack of desire to obey the family rules and their difficulty in controlling him.

Taking all this into account, the CPD make a very difficult decision - they change the foster parents because the first couple hasn't established the necessary emotional bond. During the last two months, V. has been living with another foster family. There, he adapts surprisingly well. At every visit the social workers note that he is becoming calmer and that the foster parents are happy and satisfied with the child's presence in their home»

For the psychologist who is working on the case there is no doubt that the main difference between the two foster families lies in the fact that the second parents show compassion, respect and even sympathy towards the child's father. The child can feel this directly. In the meantime, the attitude of the first foster family towards the parents was ill-intentioned and resentful.

Let try to see the differences more clearly by using our imaginations to look into the souls of the foster parents and listen to their inner monologues.

The first foster parents were probably thinking and saying to each other something along the lines of: "The poor thing! The mother is probably a prostitute in Spain and the father is wasting all the money here. They are both useless! We have to be for him now like a real mum and dad!"

This pity and neglecting and labelling of the parents have made it impossible for the child to grow close to the foster family without having the feeling that he is betraying his parents. And as we have already seen, every person has a natural and overwhelming loyalty towards his/her parents.

In the second case, the thoughts of the foster parents are hugely different: "Yes, these are his parents. They are poor and now we have to help them. But despite the hardship they are dedicated to their child. They are concerned for him. And just look what a strong bond he has with his father!"

We see that here the key to the child's heart is hanging on a string around the necks of his parents. Only by respecting the parents who brought the child into the world can the foster family provide a home in which the child feels loved and secure.

**WHAT CAN THE REJECTION OF THE MOTHER LEAD TO?
(SHARED CASE STUDY)**

The second example of such supervision is from the CPD in Pazardjik. There, a social worker, S., described a case in which a foster mother had the ambition to push the biological mother out of the life of a 4- year-old boy. This ambition was so strong that the foster mother didn't allow any argument or intervention to dissuade her from her efforts to break the bond between the biological mother and her child. She had even submitted documents for adoption and, since the mother had gone abroad to earn money (which she intended to use to raise her child), there was a real risk of her losing her parental rights.

The depiction of this case developed in two stages.

In the first stage, S. arranged in the field the mother, the foster mother and the child. For all that were present during the session, it became clear that the child had a longing for his own mother and that the proper decision for his life was for him to be with her. Towards the foster mother the child shared his own mother's mistrust and fear.

In the second stage we introduced the foster mother, the foster child and the foster mother's own daughter, who was a student abroad. Here, it became clear that the daughter was strongly affected by the ambitions of her mother

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towards the other child. She felt pushed out of the family and even voiced the following message to her mother:

“Mother, I am your real child. Please look at me!”

But the mother didn't hear her daughter's words. She was absorbed by her fixation of possessing the foster child and saving him from his own mother.

Then the representative of the mother was invited to answer:

„I am ready to sacrifice you for this child“.

This led to a severe internal conflict. The representative of the mother refused to admit that this was true. But the facilitator insisted: “Maybe it isn't true, but it is exactly what you are doing. You are grasping this child so hard that you aren't noticing the suffering of your own daughter, who has gone all the way to Germany.” This gradually led to the mother regaining her reason. It turned out that the potential for influencing her to give up her ambitions was in her own child, which she could really lose. The paradoxical thing in this case was that the daughter supported her mother in her words, because she was afraid of confronting her.

When the representative of the mother was invited to give an answer: “I am ready to sacrifice you because of this child”, this led to an acute internal conflict in the foster mother. It turned out that the potential for influencing her to give up on her ambitions for the little boy lay with her own child who she had a possible chance of losing. The paradox here was that in the actual case the daughter supported the mother with her words because she was afraid of confronting her.

In the work on this case we also see where disrespect for the Law of Belonging leads, especially with regard to the mother. The person who is responsible for violating the law could lose her connection with her own child.

Here again the social worker and the psychologist from the CPD could see, without doubt, the important underlying dynamics of the case and work on it with greater clarity.

CHAPTER TEN

Liudmil Stefanov

The abandoned child within a social atom

What is a social atom?

The term “social atom” was introduced by the Austrian psychologist and creator of the psychodrama Jacob Moreno. Moreno points out that every person has a group of people who are friends of his. “But among these people there is a small group that means something personal to him to some extent concerning some criteria. He feels attraction to them or rejects them. This small group of people, with which the individual is emotionally connected, I call the social atom.

PASSING OF THE CHILD FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER

In the core of the social atom stands the family. And when children are concerned we have to keep in mind that the family is not only their emotional support, but also the people without which life is practically impossible. Let us ask ourselves what goes on inside the child’s soul if this closest group of people is constantly changing?

The fate of children that have been left to be raised in an institution is often connected to the child being passed around from one person to another. In the beginning, he has been with its own parents – conceived and born by them.

Afterwards, he goes to an institution and this provides the opportunity to survive.

The child’s next step, in the current context of deinstitutionalisation in Bulgaria, is to go to a foster family that provides him with temporary care in a family environment.

(It is also possible to work for reintegration in the biological family.)

In the end, the moment of adoption comes, the idea being that the child finds a permanent solution for its life needs in the adoptive family.

During all these transitions, it is of great importance for the child that mutual respect exists among all the care providers. If they speak hatefully and negatively of each other, if they have a supercilious and rejecting attitude towards the person who has cared for the child before them, the life of this child becomes a jigsaw puzzle that is too complex for him/her to put together.

For example, if the child has been cared for in an institution for some time and afterwards reintegrated into his biological family, it would be very difficult for the child if its parents voiced their negative fantasies about the representatives of the institution: “Our poor child! I wonder what he has gone through with those people. They always show on television how they torture the children.”

Such fantasies of the parent about the institution could, all too easily, make the impressionable child lapse into self-pity and reject his own history by forming an aggressive attitude towards a significant part of his life. He would feel better with his parents and would adapt to them faster, if they had a different, more positive picture of the institution: "We are grateful to the people that work there. Thanks to them the child survived and we can now take him back with us."

I stress that this way of thinking should be purposefully taught by the social workers, pedagogues and psychologists who work in the system for providing care for children and families.

**LED BY FATE
(INTERACTIVE EXERCISE)**

In our training groups with the representatives of the RCMD, we did a demonstrational exercise that was designed especially for them. With this exercise, described below, the participants could experience the situation of a child that has been passed from one person to another and has been cared for by grown-ups in different roles. After he has been conceived by its parents and born into the world, he ends up in an institution, is passed to a foster family and in the end is adopted. This is a typical fate for many children that have been accommodated in an institution during their earlier childhood.

The exercise consists of the following steps:

The participants are divided into two groups- half of them representing children, the other half, adults. The adults consecutively take the roles of the biological parents, then a representative of the institution, who is taking care of the children, then a foster parent and in the end – an adoptive parent.

During the exercise the children interact with these adults in succession. Their interaction is symbolized by them drawing together on a sheet of paper that belongs to the child.

During the exercise nobody speaks. The participants aren't allowed to discuss in advance what they are going to draw. The silence in which the interaction takes place increases the feeling of profundity.

At the start, the adults sit in a circle and beside every one of them there is an empty chair for a child. The children are arranged standing in the middle of the circle. Every child has a white sheet of paper and the adults have marker pens of different colours.

In the first stage of the activity, the grown-ups represent the child's parents. On the basis of the facilitator's instructions, the children start to move chaotically inside the circle and then he says: "And now let every child choose a parent and sit beside him... and let the parents and children start to draw whatever they decide."

After about two minutes the facilitator says "Stop! It is time for you to separate. Say goodbye! Let the children take their sheet of paper and continue to move chaotically within the circle"

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After some brief movement the facilitator claps his hands and says: "Stop! Close your eyes! Let all the children close their eyes! And now Fate will take you to an institution."

After that, the facilitator takes the role of Fate, guiding the children by their shoulders with their eyes still closed. One after the other, he places them in the empty chair of another representative adult.

At this stage those playing adults have become representatives of an institution.

The following instruction is now given: "And now let the representative of the institution and the child continue drawing on the sheet of paper." After about two minutes the facilitator again says: "Stop! It is time for you to separate. Say goodbye and let the children continue to move around in the circle."

In this way, the exercise is repeated four times until the grown-ups go through all the roles consecutively: parent, institution representative, foster parent and adoptive parent. And, in every role, they draw on the paper together with a new child.

In the phase where they have to share, the participants answer the following question: "What did I experience during the exercise?"

Here are some of the most common answers:

"I felt best at the beginning with the parents. With them I drew the most important things on my sheet of paper."

"It was very depressing when Fate was leading me with my eyes shut. When he put his hands on my shoulders I felt crushed by their weight. I felt as if I was lost. I was dizzy and my feet stumbled. I felt fear, because I didn't know where I was going to end up."

"It was very unpleasant for me when the next adult didn't acknowledge what we I had drawn with the previous one. I was angry at the foster mother. She spoiled a flower that I had drawn with the parent. She apparently wanted to make it better, but it was very unpleasant for me."

**ORGANISING THE PROCESS OF THE CHILD PASSING
FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER**

We see that the pain of each separation, the adaption to a new environment, can be experienced every time by the child as if (s)he "starting life from the beginning". The only way for this pain to be reduced to proportions in which won't be destructive in terms of amplifying the child's inner resistance is for the adults that have taken on caring for the child to have a respectful attitude towards each other and to demonstrate it so it is explicit for the child.

According to Bert Hellinger, in the child's family system it is necessary for everyone to stand in his/her right place, to obey the order of the system, and to respect the others who are standing in their own place.

In this way, a model for managing the process of passing the child from one person's care to another was unfolded, analysed and developed in our

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seminars. This was achieved by using an educational film and having the participants work in small groups.

Here is a brief description of this model, where we will use an example in which the child goes from the foster parent's home to the home of the adoptive parents:

- The adoptive parents meet the foster parents under the control of the social service, become acquainted with them and they discuss the child together. It is of great importance that this contact is respectful and works as an exchange of experience and information between adults who have shared responsibility for the child;

- The adoptive parents visit the home of the foster family, where they are introduced to the child;

- The child visits the adoptive parent's home, accompanied by the foster parents;

- Eventually, the child remains at the adoptive family's home;

This model provides a smooth transition. In the opposite case, the child has the feeling that he has been yanked from one place to be planted in another place, without any link between the two.

Of course, in social work things sometime develop extremely quickly and there is simply no time for the ideal, gradual adaptation. But even in these cases, the most important thing is for the adults to have a genuinely respectful attitude towards each other.

We are again convinced that, in order for a person to be a good foster parent or adoptive parent, they require a significant level of personal maturity. This maturity allows them to hold in positive regard every person in the chain of those who have contributed in one way or another to the child's life and development. It is also essential to have the necessary respect towards the unique place that the child's parents have in his life.

THE INSTITUTIONAL VIEW: ATTACHMENT DISORDER

The picture below shows how a child that has lived in an institution watches and exists in space. From this look in the eyes we can recognize a condition that is often encountered in institutions attachment disorder.



Here are some of the most common behavioural symptoms that are part of this disorder:

- Avoiding eye contact – eye contact is usually the best indicator of real connection and quality communication between people;

- Random attachment and following like a puppy dog after every person met, or the opposite – refusing contact. These are actually two contrasting forms of the inability to form a deep attachment;

- Excessive dependence on others and unfounded desires and delusions regarding the people who are caring for him/her – both are connected to lack of boundaries.

- Displays of cruelty, severe annoyance and humiliation of others, stealing, lying – all this is a case of badly formed internal barriers for inappropriate behaviour;

- Subservient and pleasing behaviour or aggressiveness – here we can also say that these are two contrasting ways to express the painful lack of attention and desire “to be seen”;

ONLY MINE!

What causes the disorder described above?

Let us make a comparison between the usual routine of the child that is being raised in a family and the child that is being raised in an institution. How does their day start and how does it proceed?

Let us assume that, in the institution, there are only personnel who are caring, meticulous, kind and devoted to their work. One of these people (we can't know exactly who, because they change by a schedule), arrives in morning at the dormitory to wake the children and get them out of bed. This person says:

- Come on children, wake up! It's time to get up!...

And so, as the day unfolds, someone from among these caring people - whoever is on duty - beckons the children to breakfast, lunch and dinner, takes care of them...

What are the main differences with the child that is living at home with his/her parents?

At home, the child is asleep and, at about seven o'clock, the parent goes to wake him up. But often, just in front of the bedroom door, he will hesitate and say to himself: “I will leave him to sleep until ten past seven!” Then he tiptoes back downstairs. However quiet these steps of the parent may be, the child hears them in his sleep and feels with its body and soul: “This love is for me only!”

The important thing here is not only the feeling of love. Much more important is the “Only for me!” element. This parental act is intended only for me.

Of course, it is also possible for the parent to be harsh. He could wake the child with a shake and a shout: “Come on, get up! Stop lying around!” But the child again feels that this is “Only for me!” He will again build his identity with the fact that he is the only one in the eyes of the most important adult - the parent.

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This couldn't happen to the child in the institution.

STOLEN LOVE

Of course the people working in institutions often tell us that they have felt deep attachment to some of the children, they have had favourites among them. They also experience special feelings which go beyond their job descriptions and professional engagement. When going to work, they are often thinking of a particular child, carrying love in their hearts and saying to themselves: "This love is only for you!"

But, at the same time, they always have an internal barrier that prevents them from deeply connecting with their favourite children. Professional ethics and a personal sense of fairness and duty can stop them from being fully dedicated to this single child. They can say to themselves: "What about the other children? I have the same duty towards them. Having a favourite isn't allowed"

During seminars and supervisions, institutional staff members often share accounts of "stolen love". This love is "stolen" because of feelings that run in parallel – guilt concerning the other children who they don't want to be envious, guilt concerning the tendency to make comparisons between their "golden child" and the others and so on.

This is something that generally doesn't happen in the family. And even if it does happens – parents can have favourites - the dimensions are very different because, for the child within the family, the special treatment, be it good or bad, is always seen as intended just for them.

CONNECTION – INTERACTION – SEPARATION

Let us continue with the comparison of the everyday schedule of a child in an institution and a child in a family.

Once it has risen from bed, the child in the family will experience many times during this particular day, connection, interaction and separation. And these are the phases that we go through throughout our entire life. Only life in the family can adequately prepare us for going through this cycle through the process of socialization.

After getting out of bed the child connects with his parents. Then he interacts with them. And by going to school, he separates from them.

At school, he connects with his schoolmates and teachers, interacts with them and then separates from them.

Later, he will go outside to play with other children from the neighbourhood. And again he will connect with them, interact and separate.

He will go swimming or to language class. There he will connect with the trainers, teachers and other children from the group, he will interact with them and separate from them.

In the end, he will return home, where he will again connect with his family, interact with his parents and later, going to bed, separate from them again.

Gradually, after many similar days, the child learns to cope with one of the greatest challenges in life: to connect with somebody, to interact with them and then separate from them.

We can reasonably assume that for the child that is being raised in an institution this process is broken. This creates difficulties in the child's future development, when, as an adult, he has to create a family, friendships, to move to another town, to handle separation, divorce, dismissal, starting a new job.

For this child, the problem starts with the first step in the three-stage process (connection – interaction – separation), during the connection itself. This is especially true if this connection is of such a kind that it requires full commitment - when we have to live with the idea: "These feelings are entirely for me!"

The damaged or unfulfilled connection reduces the depth of the bond and a lack of a full sense of purpose and joy during the shared activity (interaction).

If he had the chance to connect, such a person would inevitably be afraid of separation. This would burden his relationship and could actually become the reason for the separation. If he needed to separate, he would bear it with difficulty. And since he knows this from the beginning, he won't devote himself to the relationship entirely. This ambivalence can lead to the breaking apart of this relationship.

We see that the basic everyday domestic routines in the family and the scheduled routines in an institution prepare us for the important things in life in entirely different ways.

PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER (CASE STUDY)

As we have said, the life situation of the abandoned and adopted children is complicated and goes through many turning points. Before they are adopted they are often cared for by many adults in different roles – educators in institutions, psychologists, social workers, doctors, foster parents. This specific fate leads to loss of internal strength, a feeling of bewilderment and confusion in relationships with the most significant people.

We will illustrate this with the case of a child in first grade that was adopted at the age of three and a half. The adopters of H. bring him for weekly consultations with the complaint of aggressive behaviour, disregard for boundaries, disobeying rules, hyperactivity...

During one of the sessions I give H. a pen and pencil. On the paper he has to draw a big circle and inside it little circles to represent himself and the people that are most important to him. With this method we can study the relationships with the people close to the child (what Moreno call the "social atom").

H. performs the task in a very strange way. On the first sheet of paper that is handed to him he draws himself and his adopters. Afterwards, he takes another sheet of paper and draws himself and “my sister Silvia” (I later found out that he has no such sister and Silvia is one of the educators from the institution. After frequently being passed from hand to hand, all these people and their roles become muddled inside the child’s mind.) He takes a third sheet of paper and draws himself and the children that he plays with when he goes to the village to visit the parents of his adoptive father. A fourth piece of paper he uses to show himself and his teacher in first grade. And a fifth sheet of paper she uses for himself and some of the children at school.

It turns out that H.’s “social atom” is located in five different universes, between which there is no connection. His life is scattered like the life of every child that has been passed from hand to hand. The feeling of chaos, disrespect of other people’s boundaries and aggression are a natural result of this lack of inner wholeness.

What can be done for such children? What is the solution?

In many institutions there is an accepted practice of having the children carry with themselves an amulet, some symbol or toy, with which the never part. The purpose of this amulet is for it to be the “red thread” which links together the life of the child when it passes from one institution to another, from one foster family to another.

It would be even more valuable than this amulet if all the people who have taken care of the child would accept each other with respect. In this way the child would be able to freely show its feelings towards the people that it is no longer in contact with, without worrying about those that are around him at the moment.

In H.’s case the real problem arises because, when they took him from the institution, the adopters have changed his name. By doing this they have even more clearly severed the wholeness of his life.

The thing that helps such children gradually put together the puzzle of their scattered path in life is for them to see - in one place all the significant people in their life - to hear their dialogue, to feel their connection. This can happen if the significant adults that are inside his social atom speak calmly and with respect about the other people in this atom. For example, the adopter could tell him: “I wonder how Silvia who was taking care of you before we adopted you would react if she heard how well you can sing?” Such phrases build bridges over the voids of the soul and gradually return the child’s life to its wholeness.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lyudmil Stefanov

The neglected fathers

“Normally I start my work with the father. In our culture the father figure is considered to be the peripheral parent. That is why I include him in the conversation immediately. By including the Father into the centre of the family problems, I give hope to all the others that something inside the family is going to change positively.”

Carl Whitaker, „Dancing with the Family“

THE STRENGTH OF MEN AND POWER OF WOMEN (AFRO-AMERICAN STORY)

This is an Afro-American story, which men usually listen to with some sadness, and women – with a slight smile:

“When God created the man and woman, he gave both of them equal strength. And put them to live in the same house. But they often argued and even fought. And since they had equal strength, their fights lasted for days and weeks without anyone being able to prevail.

The man got tired of this constant struggle. He went to God and told him:

- God, you are almighty! You have created everything in this world. You even light and turn out the stars in the sky. Only you can help me, the man. Give me more strength so that I can handle the woman! In this way you won't have to constantly come down from the sky to reconcile us after our fights.

- Ok– said God - From today onwards you will have more strength than the woman.

The man ran home and announced to his wife from the door that he was now stronger than her. She became very angry and jumped up to fight him. But she was immediately defeated. And so a second and third time – whenever she jumped up to fight with the man, she was knocked down in an instant.

The man became arrogant and said to her:

- You be careful! God has given me more strength. I will be your master from now on.

The woman, in her turn, went to God the very next day:

- God, give me some more strength too! Even a little!

- I can't! All that I had I gave to the man.

- Ok then. Please take your strength back from the man!

- I can't do that either. What I have already given has been given!

The woman set off for home very upset. However, on the way, she met the Devil and told him about all her problems. The Devil said to her:

.....

- Don't worry, woman! Wipe the tears from your face, remove this unhappy face and go back to God. Ask Him to give you the three keys which hang on the door of His palace and quickly come back to me!

The woman went to God again and He agreed for her to take the keys. Then the Devil instructed her:

- With these keys lock the doors of the kitchen, bedroom and children's room. Because when the man returns home, first he thinks about food. Then he likes to go to the bedroom to lie down and have a nap. You should also know that the man loves his children very much. And he enjoys watching his offspring grow. Remember well – added the Devil – you won't unlock these three rooms for him until he starts using his strength as it suits and pleases you!

The woman returned home and did exactly that. When the man returned, he found her sitting on the doorstep and singing:

“Chop down the strong tree to make a swing for me...”

When he saw that the doors of the three rooms were locked, the man began to rage. He tried to force them open, relying on his strength, but failed. And shouted at the woman:

- Woman, open these doors quickly! How could you close them?

- God gave me the key—answered the woman.

The man ran to God:

- God, what have you done? You have given the woman three keys and now I can't go into the kitchen to eat, neither into the bedroom to sleep, neither can I see my children. Give me keys to these rooms too!

- I can't – said God. – I don't have others. And whatever I have given the woman I won't take back. Go home and reconcile with her.

The man returned. He tried everything, but the woman didn't give in. He started to beg and assure her, to do everything that suited her, until she agreed to unlock the doors for him.

But the man thought that this wasn't enough and proposed:

- Let's make a deal! You will give me the keys half the time and I will give you half of my strength.

- I will think about it – the woman said. And sat down to think. But the devil showed himself at the window and whispered to her:

- Don't agree, woman. Let the strength remain for him and the keys for you! And remember: when the horse flies attack her, the mare needs a tail.

So the deal was rejected.

And since then the man withholds his strength so that he can get along win the woman.

And that is why men concede and women insist on what they want”.

“FATHER UNKNOWN!”

This story depicts a situation in the family which has existed for time immemorial. Since the mother is the one who gives birth to the baby, carries it during pregnancy, and provides the initial care for the life of the child and ensures its survival, she has the dominant role in the child’s life. That is why she often holds the power over the children. The key for the connection between the children and the father is in her hands. Very often she may even ignore the husband as a parent if their relationship isn’t good.

In Bulgaria, unlike many other countries, after the child’s birth the mothers have the right to hide the identity of the man with whom she has conceived, and write in the child’s birth certificate: “Father unknown”. The paradox here is that for everyone around her (relatives, neighbours and friends) the father’s identity could be an open secret, but the Bulgarian government allows the mother to declare that he is unknown.

This legal absurdity has led to the ruin of many lives. In the work of our organization and all the social institutions in the country there are many cases in which the child has been abandoned in an institution and after time the “unknown” father learns that the woman whom he has had a relationship with has given birth to his child after they have separated. Then the “unknown” fathers takes his child from the institution, cares for it, raises it by himself and often allows without any trouble for the mother to have access to the child. That is – he act fully in the child’s interest.

Here we can’t bypass the issue of the prejudicial attitude of the representatives of the social services themselves towards the father. Very often they assume, without the necessary investigation, that the father is not interested in the child. It appears to be a reasonable interpretation since the mother wants to leave the child in an institution and has deliberately written: “Father unknown” to facilitate this process. They assume that the father doesn’t care about the child. But this is something that has to be investigated in absolutely every situation. Because if the mother refuses to take care of the child, who else is more suitable than the father?

THERE IS A FATHER – THERE IS A PROBLEM! NO FATHER – NO PROBLEM!

The abuse of fathers in Bulgaria is not only connected with the actions of bitter women who want to erase him from the biography of their child. When talking about socially disadvantaged families with many children, especially of Roma origin, this has been policy in the past and it continues to be a deliberate policy. In such cases, government employees do not observe a policy of mandatory disclosure of the father’s identity.

Here are relevant observations provided by Elena Petkova, HHC regional coordinator for Ruse region:

.....

“When it comes to fathers – their role has often been purposefully ignored throughout the child protection system despite the fact that reform has been going on for years.

It often happens that in the maternity hospital they explain to the mothers of Roma origin that it is better for them to write “Father unknown” because this will give them the right to more support as single mothers. This suggestion is completely misleading! Most often, the suggestion reveals corruption that is usually linked to adoption. With no identifiable father, adoption can be arranged more easily and from adoption money can be made - both officially and unofficially!

Other motives could be simply laziness, or negative beliefs and discrimination towards the Roma (the idea that it is better for the children to be kept in an institution, rather than stay with these awful Roma parents).

In most of the cases that I have worked on, when it was explained to the parents (and the father was included) that the recognition is free of charge and afterwards the family has the same rights to social support and in some cases additional ones (for example for registering and receiving a home from the municipal housing department), the fathers recognized their children. This automatically led to them taking greater responsibility for the children. The material and organisational resources of the family would increase substantially.

In general, it is much easier for the mothers to be manipulated when the fathers don't have rights over the children and can't officially stand beside the women in order to protect their child from the attempts for totally unjustified institutionalisation or the signing of declarations to prevent the child being put on the adoption register.”

We could again reveal the key difference in the approaches, which would yet again show the value and objective of the deinstitutionalisation process which HHC has been engaged with in Bulgaria and others countries where it operates. With our work for the family we aim to include the resources of all people concerned, who can support the children and families in risk (both parents, the members of the extended family, neighbours and people from the community). While in the decaying system for institutional care the staff and professionals very often have aimed at the opposite: the child to be simply left in an institution and nobody to show concern for it so as not to obstruct them when “doing their job”.

NEGLECTING THE “KNOWN” FATHER

Experience reveals that it isn't necessary to have “Father unknown” written on the birth certificate in order to bypass the father when looking for resources to raise the child. And not only the father, the grandfather and uncles could also be neglected.

The presumption of the workers in the child protection system is that women are naturally more caring and devoted to the children. In instances when the mother doesn't want to provide care (or can't), the father is hardly likely to.

It is important to note that this isn't simply attributable to the preponderance of women in the child protection system. Men working within the system are also likely to underestimate the caring resources within the male members of a family.

Valeria Draganova, HHC coordinator of in Sofia, provides an account of a case which illustrates the caring capacity of the father:

"The father K. is a Roma aged 25 years, for whom this is a first child. The mother is nine years younger than him and has a psychiatric illness combined with an element of intellectual disability.

Before meeting the father, the mother used to live in great poverty, in a house without running water. She often went to forage in the garbage bins.

Her husband took her to a house with much better facilities. But due to her low level of personal maturity, she often takes the child with her and runs off to her parents. There the child constantly gets ill.

Then the mother went to her parents without taking the child. The father left his job temporarily so that he could take care of the child. At this point, he started contact with the RCMD and HHC.

Despite his difficult situation, he takes care of the child. He conscientiously meets all the child's needs. He is proactive and seeks the support, cooperation and advice of the social workers."

The principle of good social work is to search for resources everywhere, without excluding important members of the child's family system in advance.

**FIVE CHILDREN DISPLACED, BUT SIX CHILDREN
RETURNED TO THE FAMILY**

This difficult and interesting social work case is from the practice of Tony Todorov, HHC coordinator in Montana region.

Here we can see many of the important aspects that we have reviewed so far. On one side – system work of many representatives of the RCMD – Montana. On the other side – the father figure standing out as a main resource for achieving positive change. The story also illustrates the great significance in abiding by the Law of Balance when providing social support or as we called it previously: the principle "Ok, but only if...!"

"Eva and Todor have five children aged one to eight years. All the children have been born in the seventh month of pregnancy and have spent time in the neonatal unit after birth.

The family lived in severe deprivation in a village close to Montana. The parents didn't provide the necessary care for their children to such an extent that their names had become known by everyone in the vicinity. The Child Protection Department (CPD) constantly received signals from people from the village.

At the start of the case, the mother was directed to a Centre for Social Support to work on increasing her parental capacity. However, there she behaved dismissively towards the staff. She was frequently aggressive and her presence was disruptive. Needless to say, very little was achieved.

At the same time, visits to the family's home revealed a horrifying situation. They lived in a house that had been built by a project for supporting the Roma about ten years earlier. In the decade that had elapsed the house had been vandalised and virtually destroyed. The windows and doors had been removed and everything that could be burned had been. The father had even dug up the floor, cut out the water pipes and sold them for scrap.

Visitors were met by the stench before they had even entered the house. Food was rotting on the ground and there were traces of human excrement. The children looked like they belonged in photos revealing Third World famine. Naked, their ribs showing, they were indescribably dirty – with huge flies landing on them. They obviously hadn't been fed in days. Meanwhile, there were empty alcohol bottles littering the floor.

The director of the Regional Directorate for Social Support personally visited their home and took part in reporting the case to the RCMD. A decision was made that the life and health of the children were in danger and the older ones were to be placed in a Home for Children Deprived of Parental Care, and the youngest one in a HMSCC. The transition was handled in a sensitive and humane manner, with a person responsible for each child and consulting psychologists.

The interesting thing here is that, despite the fact that these parents were labelled by all outside observers (neighbours, social workers) as people who didn't care about their children, this was not consistent with their significant efforts to halt the removal of their children and, subsequently, to have them returned to the family home. Their behavior confirmed the truth that even parents living in great poverty, who have contributed to horrifying living conditions by drinking, actually love their children.

They started by voicing complaints and strong statement of disagreement. They threatened they were going to commit suicide by jumping off the building of the regional administration. They tried to win the media on their side but the same reporters – somewhat exploitatively - had been to the family home and shown the conditions of the children. For the space of a month, the couple worked on convincing themselves that they were either going to have to improve their parenting performance or lose their children to institutional care.

Improvements started. The main driver in the process of positive change was the father. It turned out that he was well-known for doing odd jobs in the village. With our advice, he changed his way of being paid and started, when working in people's homes, to ask not for small amounts of money and a bottle of spirits for his labour, as he had been doing before, but for household items, clothes or normal payment with which to create better conditions for his children. The family received support from HHC and from the social welfare system, but the principle was "Give in order to receive!": "We will give you furniture if first you renovate your house; we will pay your electricity if first you re-install running water..."

The mayor of the village also participated as an important representative of the RCMD. He found a job for the man in a temporary employment programme and was very pleased with him.

That is how the preparation for returning the children proceeded. And when this process was already quite advanced, the mother became pregnant for the sixth time. For this reason, the older children were returned home first, so that there weren't too many small children for her to care for at once. Nevertheless, the whole family got together for Christmas.

Again, with the help of the father we persuaded the woman to use contraception. But after some time the family had a serious crisis. The woman ran away with some old lover and abandoned the family for several days. She spent two-three days with this man and afterwards was afraid to return home. We searched for her again with the major of the village and found her with her parents. Her husband promised not to beat her and she returned home...

For a year and a half things there have been going well. Indicative of the fathers concern is the fact that he had an opportunity to work in a project for laying sewage pipes in Montana for quite a big salary. But he declined so that he could take part in caring for the children. Now the family has a garden in front of the house and in the summer they all go to pick herbs and mushrooms. The children attend school. They have fully understood the principle that help isn't just given for nothing, it has to be earned with a commitment to work towards improvement."

**CHANGES IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS FATHERS
AFTER OUR WORK WITH THE RCMD**

We recognise that the deinstitutionalisation process is hardly achievable, despite the "European directives" (edicts from a faraway place) that we talk about in Bulgaria, if the attitudes of the representatives of the institutions towards the families don't change. We cannot continue to underestimate the resources available within families and cannot continue to be dismissive towards those parents that we group together and label as having "poor parenting skills".

In the survey that was already cited, held in two stages in 2012 and 2013, it was made evident how the attitudes of the representatives of the RCMD towards the mothers and fathers had been influenced during the period of their collaborative work. This change is attributable to the seminars, work meetings, and to sharing of the results of the survey itself. This made RCMD representatives realize the extent to which the role of the father is underestimated.

The attitude towards the mother also changed in a positive way. Here is how this change looks:

Question 19	End of 2012	Summer of 2013
In most cases the mothers, whose children are being raised in institutions, experience maternal feelings similar to other mothers.	Plovdiv – 3,13 Ruse – 3,75 Gabrovo – 3,87 Pernik – 3,87 Pazardjik – 3,06 Montana – 3,10 Targovishte – 3,05	Plovdiv – 3,25 Ruse – 3,78 Gabrovo – 3,90 Pernik – 3,64 Pazardjik – 3,62 Montana – 3,39 Targovishte – 3,45

Even during the initial survey it was noted that the participants in the survey had positive expectations for the mothers and their maternal instincts. There was no geographical region in which the average of the answers provided to this question lay in the negative part of the scale (less than 3). This fully reflects the idea of the sanctity of motherhood and the general indestructibility of maternal instinct. This is the reason why, in some of the regions, we didn't register significant change over the period. (See the results for Plovdiv, Pernik, Ruse and Gabrovo.)

Here is how the attitude towards the fathers and their paternal feelings has changed:

Question 23	End of 2012	Summer of 2013
In most cases the fathers, whose children are being raised in institutions, experience paternal feelings similar to other fathers.	Plovdiv – 2,36 Ruse – 3,05 Gabrovo – 3,40 Pernik – 3 Pazardjik – 2,59 Montana – 2,19 Targovishte – 3,08	Plovdiv – 3,87 Ruse – 3,56 Gabrovo – 3,72 Pernik – 3,15 Pazardjik – 3,62 Montana – 3,39 Targovishte – 3,18

In the analysis of the results for the first survey from the end of 2012 we notice that many people judge the fathers of institutionalised children negatively. We see many regions where the attitude towards these fathers is in the negative part of the scale (below 3). By the way, these results were noted and commented on many forums in the presence of the RCMD representatives and this made a strong impression on the participants. However, we can see from the results for the survey done in the summer of 2013, the attitude towards the fathers has undergone a significant positive change and there are no longer any regions where the attitude shows a negative tendency.

An especially strong impression is given by the changes from 2,36 to 3,87! in Plovdiv; from 2,36 to 3,87! in Pazardjik; from 2,19 to 3,39! in Montana. Growth of more than one grade in a five grade scale reveals a significant attitudinal change especially when the average recorded crosses from negative to positive.

An attitudinal adjustment that says “I was negative and now I am positive” is qualitatively different from one showing that an individual is less negative or more positive than (s)he was before.

Many of the participants in the survey have (re)discovered the child-raising potential of the father that somehow they had doubted or were blind to. Our expectations are that with this change in attitudes there is a better chance for the fathers to no longer be excluded on the basis of professional misconceptions and gender prejudice when childcare options are being considered. This adds a vital component to the range of potential resources available for consideration by child protection services.

CASE STUDY

As we have already been seen, there is a great deal of evidence available to show us that that the resources of the father can turn out a key factor in prevention or deinstitutionalisation cases.

Here is another relevant case, shared by Bilyana Kerimova, HHC coordinator for Pazardjik region:

“G. is a girl, eight years old. Her parents are divorced. The father is a victim of constant alcohol abuse and lives in very poor conditions in an abandoned caravan. The mother had no visible options and couldn’t provide a living for herself and little G. For this reason, she decided to go to work abroad and leave G. to be cared for in an institution for babies.

From the child’s records we found out where the father lived. When we visited him the living conditions in the caravan was really horrifying and there was no doubt that the child could not be introduced into such an environment.

Our first task was to build the relationship - the emotional bond - between the father and child. This went surprisingly well. At the beginning they met for only an hour or two a week and, after some time, they started spending every weekend together. The father started saying that he wanted very much to take his child back from the HMSCC. But the Child Protection Department told him that is was out of the question that they would allow the child to live that caravan.

Gradually, the father changed his way of life. He found himself a full-time job. It turned out that he had inherited an apartment in Sofia, which he rented while he lived in the caravan. With the support of social welfare he managed to make the necessary improvements to the apartment and was allowed to live there with the child.

This person completely transformed before my eyes!”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Lyudmil Stefanov

The world of the poor Roma

THIS FATHER IS ALSO REAL (SPIRITUAL EXERCISE)

Some time ago, I was walking down the street in a modern neighbourhood in Sofia full of impressive new buildings. On the opposite pavement, I saw a father of Roma origin, who was leading his child by the hand: a girl aged 6 or 7. Suddenly, the father crossed the road and walked towards the rubbish bins. He rummaged through them carefully examining their contents and took whatever he thought was of value. While he did this, the little girl watched him from the other side of the road and waited for him to finish. Then the father took his bags, held the child by the hand and continued on his way.

I felt disturbed by this sight: a father caring for his child while scavenging for scrap. But I suddenly acknowledged something else – the fact that this father was essentially no different from other dads. Captured in the silhouette of the two figures walking down the street holding hands and in the way they looked at each other, was the image of a loving father. Warmth and affection could be seen in their eyes. Seen from a far, this father wasn't distinguishable from fathers like me and those of you reading this book. We take our children to school in the morning lovingly holding hands and carrying their heavy satchels until we reach the gate.

Since that encounter, every time that I see an adult Roma with a child rummaging in the rubbish bins, I watch them intently. I consider this a very good **spiritual exercise** for people working in child protection: when they see Roma children going round the rubbish bins, led by their father, mother, grandmother or grandfather, they should look at them openly, without any prejudice, and acknowledge the bond that holds the family together – the bond between the generations from whose life-giving power we all originate.

DEATH AND POVERTY

But what do we, the majority of Bulgarians, normally see when looking at the Roma? We certainly don't see people like us. It's not unusual for many social workers to report that, at the start of their careers, they approached their early visits to the Roma ghettos with fear. (What will happen to me there?) The fear that we are talking about often lacks a rational and meaningful explanation. It is not rooted in experience and – therefore – it is all the more difficult to overcome. It has become a part of the life of most Bulgarians on the basis of tales and superstitions.

Let's remind ourselves of a threat, a warning, which many Bulgarians have heard as children from their grandmother and grandfathers, parents and other adults:

“If you don't behave the gypsy woman will come and take you away!”

Try to feel for a moment what happens in the child's imagination and soul when it hears this sentence. Try to imagine where exactly “the gypsy woman will take you away” if you don't behave. This figure of the gypsy woman, coming to take you away, is similar the character of Torbelan, who takes the naughty children and carries them away somewhere. And that “somewhere” is the Kingdom of Death.

To put it another way, when we look at the Roma we don't see people like us, but people symbolizing death and poverty. Perhaps, the main reason for this perception is based on the fact for centuries the Roma haven't led a settled way of life. They have been living as travelling people, wandering from one place to another. They have been perceived as “people of the road”: unpredictable, strange, possibly somewhat romantic, but mostly poor, dirty and dangerous.

That is why it isn't at all strange that among the many people who are professionally involved in social work, there are those who with ease and a “clear conscience” prescribe “displacement of the child” from the Roma family. (I want to remind you that a person says that he is acting with a clear conscience when he is preparing to do something to someone that he would not want done to his own kin). Often these service providers behave as if blind and they don't see the strong emotional bond which connects the child with its poor Roma mother who smells like she needs a good wash. They don't consider the significance of this bond.

The reason that they are blind is that at a symbolic level they view the Roma as inhuman, related with death and poverty. In this sense, by displacing the child from the Roma family they have an inner alibi that they a **saving** it from death and poverty. All those working in child protection have heard some version of the message: “Let's take these children to a small-group home. There they will be better off than in the ghetto.”

A STORY WITH PAIN AND TEARS

In many cases, those displaced from their poor families and “saved” from poverty children are deeply traumatized and their parents humiliated and ruined. Kremena Stoyanova, HHC coordinator for Plovdiv region tells the following story:

“A Roma mother phoned our office asking for help. The Child Protection Department had “taken” her child, a boy aged 3. The reason they gave was lack of adequate living space at home and bad living conditions. The family had nine children and they experienced great difficulty fitting into the two small rooms of their home.

The mother hadn't seen her child for two months. This boy also had a twin-sister and there was a very strong bond between them. Her suffering was also very great.

The mother complained that she simply didn't know what to do to find her child. But she very much wanted to see him and take him home. However, she was afraid that if she didn't search for him, in time he could be given for adoption.

I already knew this family. I had visited them at the place where they lived. And the twins had made a very strong impression on me. Especially the sister. She was lively, spontaneous and open. Every time that I went to their home, she would rush to meet me at the door. But now, after her brother had been removed, she had become completely uncommunicative. When I went to their home it was as if I was seeing a completely different child. She was hiding behind her mother and father, she was anxious and afraid.

I found out that the boy had been placed in a HMCC. One day I picked up the mother and father by car and went to find him. It was important in this case both for the parents to see the child and to have on record the fact that they showed concern for him so that he didn't come to be included in the adoption list.

It turned out that this HMCC was somewhere on the outskirts of the city where I hadn't been before. It was difficult to find beyond a labyrinth of narrow streets. I have a university degree, am an experienced driver and I have a GPS. Despite these social advantages I found it difficult to find the way. I could imagine how those who had lived their entire life in the Roma quarter, had no means of transport and had difficulty reading street signs would have found it impossible without me.

Anyway, we got there. A member of the HMCC staff told us to come the next day because the children had been taken to a theatre performance and the meeting couldn't take place. I had the feeling that the aim of these people is simply to send the parents away and create difficulties for them if they have come to look for their children.

I didn't agree with this and said that we would stay in the car if necessary and wait for the children to return. But I am convinced that if the parents had come without me they would have simply left out of frustration and a sense of intimidation. For them these are words spoken by an official, a person of authority. And then, had they simply left, who knows when they would come back again. Because, having to travel to the opposite side of the city takes time and money. Five-six leva isn't a small sum for these people.

We were just heading to the car when the children appeared from around the corner. I imagined that in the space of two months the boy could have become estranged from his mother and father and wouldn't react immediately. But there was nothing of the sort. When it saw his mother he shouted loudly: "Mama!!!", ran and hugged her. They were hugging, crying and didn't want to let go of one another. The father, crying, also joined them. I stood aside and also cried. The social workers also started crying when they saw this picture.

Within a few months with the efforts of the RCMD in Plovdiv we managed to return the child to the family. The mayor of Izgrev municipality, the director of the Regional Directorate for Social Support and the director of the Child Protection Department also became involved. The municipal housing department

found another home for them which met the needs of the large family. Also with the help of our organization, the home was prepared and equipped for use. The reintegration process lasted for several months.

I also visited the family after they started living in the new house. The twin-sister had again become communicative and open towards me. But her brother carries even now the trauma of the several months of deinstitutionalisation. He doesn't dare go out into the street. He is scared of the cars, the coming-and-going and everything that isn't part of life in an enclosed environment. The family is also afraid to let him go into the street by himself because he has lost his ability to take care of himself.

I am convinced that these are mental wounds that will never fully heal. For me working for prevention and improvement of the living conditions of the family always comes first."

DEAR DAUGHTER, THESE CHILDREN ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY!

The workers in the social sphere most often work with poor people. And poor people, especially the Roma, usually have many children. Every Bulgarian person has heard the statement that the Roma give birth to many children in order to receive social welfare. For them having children has turned into a kind of profitable industry.

In our training group almost every seminar gives us a good opportunity to test the validity of this statement by using the family constellations method. The power of this method is in the fact that the people from the group who have such opinions of these poor Roma parents, can feel their inner truth by entering their roles as representatives.

Here is such an example, which has been played in different versions in many of the training groups:

Silvia is a social worker. She heatedly talks about a mother with seven children that she is currently working with. Silvia is very discouraged by this large number of children and isn't enthusiastic about searching for resources within the family system as the model for active family support requires. She is convinced that these people give birth to children because the state gives them social benefits to raise them and social work with them is hopeless. She claims that these mothers with many children don't have regard for any laws: "neither Hellinger's Law of Belonging (because they abandon their children), nor the laws of the government..."We decide to look into the interaction of the social worker with this family by using the energy of the family constellation method field.

Facilitator: (To the group) You can see how angry Silvia is at these people. She wants, if possible, to scream at them how unworthy they are as parents, to hold them by the shoulders and shake them so that they are startled. And she sees no point in her work with them. Now, I will ask for seven representatives of the children to get up and stand here arranged in a semicircle. And in front of them we will place a representative of their mother. The children look at the mother and the mother looks at her children.

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(After making this arrangement she turns to Silvia) And now you enter into your role as a social worker who is helping this family. Stand here, next to the mother. Look at the children and tell them what burdens your soul. Tell them: “Children, your mother gave birth to you only to receive money for it. She is an irresponsible person. She is just using you.”

Silvia: (After some hesitation) Children, your mother gave birth to you only to receive money for it. She is an irresponsible person. She is just using you.

Facilitator: (After a pause) Let’s see how these words affected the people from the family. How did the mother feel after hearing these words?

Mother: (With hesitation) Well... nothing. She speaks strange things. This doesn’t concern me at all.

Facilitator: OK. But aren’t you going to do anything to show the social worker that she is wrong? She said things about you that are quite serious accusations.

Mother: I don’t know. I don’t care about this woman at all.

Facilitator: (To the children) And how are the children? How did the social worker’s words affect you?

Child 1: I almost didn’t hear her. She speaks things that I don’t understand at all.

Child 2: Honestly speaking, it is as if she doesn’t exist to me.

Child 3: In the beginning I felt sad that she is saying such things about my mother, but then I saw that mother wasn’t offended, so now it is just the same to me too.

Facilitator: (To the group) Obviously, these words aren’t going to have any effect. The mother is not going to feel ashamed and get moving. The children are also not touched. Actually it seems that the family hasn’t noticed the social worker at all. What is being played before us shows that if she has such an attitude, if she carries such thoughts in her soul, the social worker becomes unneeded and nobody from the family sees her. Let us now try to affect the situation in a different way. I will choose a representative of the children’s grandmother, who is their mother’s mother. (To the new representative) Turn towards your mother. She wants to tell you something.

Facilitator: (To the grandmother after a pause) Tell your daughter: “Dear daughter, these children are your responsibility.”

Grandmother: Dear daughter, these children are your responsibility.

Facilitator: “You gave birth to them and have to take care of them.”

Grandmother: You gave birth to them and have to take care of them.

(At these words the mother of the children starts to breathe fast and heavy. Tears appear in her eyes. She takes a step forward and holds her mother by the hand.)

Facilitator: (To the group) We see what a strong effect the words of the grandmother had on the mother. This means that she knows very well what her responsibilities are. (To the mother) How is the mother now? Tell us what happened to you?

Mother: When my mother told me that these children are my responsibility it was as if someone had poured hot water over me. I got goose bumps and now I have strong energy. I am fully aware that my mother is right.

Facilitator: (To the group) We can clearly understand what a great resource the grandmother is. If we turn to this resource as workers in the social system, instead of moralizing, it is much more likely for the people to hear us. Have in mind that when the Roma are concerned the resource could be found not only in the grandmother, but also in the great-grandmother or great-grandfather of the children. If we are working with a community where it is a regular phenomenon for the women to give birth at the age of 15, there you may see great-grandmothers aged 45-50 who are in their prime. It isn't impossible even for great-great-grandmothers and great-great-grandfathers to be a resource. But we as Bulgarians don't take them into consideration at all, because we imagine that they are either senile or dead.

Facilitator: (To the mother) Now, let go of your mother's hand and turn to your children. Look at the children and feel your mother behind your back (After a pause to the children) How are you now?

Children: Now when grandmother has also come we are very well. There is nothing bothering us anymore... I have the feeling that we don't lack anything now...I am alright.

(At this moment the social worker who had been standing about a metre and a half away from the mother starts to back off and stands at the edge of the circle)

Facilitator: (To the social worker) What's happening with you? Where are you going?

Social worker: I sense that I no longer have work here in the centre of the action and I want to withdraw more to the side.

Facilitator: (To the group) When the resources of the whole family are drawn to the stage the social worker really doesn't have a place in the centre of the action. She helps from the side and monitors the process. She is no longer so important.

Social worker: (Spontaneously) I really don't feel so important anymore and the tension has gone from me. In the beginning, when I was looking at these children, things seemed scary to me. I thought that there was nothing to be done.

Mother: If the father also stands beside me there will no longer be any problems.

Facilitator: OK, we will choose a representative of the father. (To the group) I do realise, that in real life it is possible that the father is actually not available. He could be separated with the mother, or he could be in prison. But this doesn't change the principle that the purpose of social work is to look for the resources within the family and community. This is the essence of the model for active family support that HHC works with around the world. The social worker to a much greater extent stimulates the people from the family system to cooperate, he negotiates mutual engagement. He is not there simply to give away social welfare. To achieve this though, trust in the resources of the system is needed.

Without such trust the social worker constantly wants to be in the center, to be most important and is angry with everybody. When he is engaged primarily with mobilizing the resources he can gradually withdraw.

**RETURN THE CHILDREN TO MUMMY SILVIA AND DADDY ASSEN!
(CASE STUDY)**

Tsveteline Arapova-Chavdarova, HHC coordinator for Pazardjik region, and now director of the Regional Directorate for Social Support in Pazardjik has been professionally involved in the following case and it has an emotional impact.

The case reflects the HHC ideology and the central idea that parents from the poorer layers of society have parental capacity, have a loving attitude towards their children and that this is most important for the life and development of the children.

“Silvia and Assen are Roma. They have four boys – aged from one to seven. The family has great material difficulties. Looking for a solution, Assen had been doing everything possible to go to work in Germany. He had been there for several weeks when we heard of the case.

The family was being monitored by the Child Protection Department. Since the mother, trying to make ends meet, used to leave the children with relatives, the social workers often stated that the mother was absent in their reports and that the children were on the street. A decision was taken to remove the children and place them under police protection.

This decision hadn't been notified to the RCMD. In the office of our organization we also didn't know about it. The way things happened was entirely unacceptable. The policemen had actually deceived the mother by saying that they were taking the children so that they could have a medical examination. The secrecy and lies involved in this case gives great cause for concern. However, it shows how easily such actions are taken against Roma families in Bulgaria.

I knew the family and although they lived poorly, I was very impressed by the fact that whenever I went to their home I would find Silvia either doing the laundry or making bread. I had always seen her and Assen as caring and well-meaning parents who simply had material difficulties and needed support.

That is why, when Silvia contacted me that evening, to ask where her children were, and when I found out that they were under police protection, I was shocked. We tried to resolve the issue, but, in the end, when it turned out that there was no other way, we took the case to court. The procedure was complicated. For every child a separate lawsuit was held. In the end, we succeeded. One by one, the children returned to the family.

It is significant that when he heard what had happened with the children, Assen returned from Germany to support his wife. With the efforts of both parents the living conditions in their home improved on a daily basis. Furthermore, for the whole period that the children were displaced from the family, these parents walked 13 kilometres every day to Pazardjik to visit them.

For me their devotion is the main factor which helped the children to overcome the trauma of their institutionalization in a very short time.

I consider this case and the success of the court cases that we arranged as one of the greatest achievements in my career. I am proud that I worked in an organization that took such an uncompromising and humane position with regard to protecting the most important right of children and parents: to live together in their home.

Now that I hold the position of director of the RDSS, this court verdict hangs in a frame above my desk as an important part of my professional biography.”

**BEHIND GOD’S MASK
(A STORY WITH AN EDIFYING QUESTION AT THE END)**

Before the beginning of one of our seminars with the RCMD, the local HHC coordinator stated basic goal: the participants in the group to develop their sensitivity towards the deep emotional bond between the parents and children. By doing this, they can be motivated to adequately support socially disadvantaged families instead of working for displacement of children for unjustifiable reasons.

However, despite the goal being established, it turned out that in a case which one of the participants shared, the right intervention was removal of the child from the family. However, the people from the social protection system couldn’t find an acceptable way to do it.

I present the case in brief, the way that the worker from the SCP presented it during a seminar of the RCMD:

S. is a boy 13 years old. He was born to parents who were quite old. His father is 70 and the mother is 57.

The problem was that S. would fall into depressive states, left the home more and more infrequently and, in fact, hardly ever go out of bed. This pattern of depression had started when he was ten.

When we started to search for resources for S., following advice given in the module Steps for Problem Solving, we discovered that the social workers from the Child Protection Department (CPD) considered the parents to be entirely inadequate. They failed to acknowledge the boy’s severe condition and it seemed strange that they resisted the idea of referring the boy to a psychiatrist.

Among his teachers and classmates there were resources, there were people who could provide support and were willing to do so but, unfortunately, S. no longer had the inclination to leave his bedroom and go to school. The only person that the CPD viewed as having a realistic understanding of the situation was S.’s uncle. The father and mother showed trust only towards a few lay preachers and constantly consulted them.

The description of the environment inside their home was also worrying.

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Their home had been turned into some sort of religious sanctuary. Inside it was constantly dark, the curtains were always drawn. Everywhere, there was religious paraphernalia - candles, icons, crosses, religious symbols...

Here the facilitator interrupted with a question:

“Very often, people who demonstrate their religiousness in such a compulsive way are concealing some sort of misdeed or perversion. Was there something similar happening in the story that you are telling?”

This direct question stimulated the woman from the CPD to share the whole story without constraint:

From their experience and from the behaviour of both the child and the parents, as well as from everything that they had collected as information from relatives, neighbours and the police, the CPD workers were convinced that the father was exploiting his son sexually. This was at the base of the son's depression and lack of desire for life.

A visit involving several social workers and counsellors to the family's home was described to the group. They had tried to establish contact with the child, but it only half-opened its eyes and didn't speak at all. Despite this, one of the social workers (the one who was now telling the story) had felt that a connection between them was forming, that it had felt some kind of closeness to her and was responding non-verbally to her words.

When the visit had finished and everyone had gone, she turned from the door and looked towards the boy's bed. She wanted to give him courage, for him to feel that he could rely on her. She smiled, waved her hand in a friendly manner and said: “Goodbye, S.! We will meet again!” The expression on the boy's face again showed a positive reaction. Then the father interfered. He looked at the child, bowed theatrically, and said, over-accentuating, with an intimidating voice: “Say goodbye, bo-o-o-o-y!” The feelings of all who were present were that this was an instinctive reaction of a malicious person who wanted to erase the experienced positive feelings and the opportunity for any hope in his victim. The desire for contact and communication in the boy's expression immediately vanished.

When describing this episode the member of the CPD stood up from her chair and impersonated the father's bow, as well as the intonation of his voice. The acting was so authentic that a shudder went through the whole group.

After all this it was quite clear to me and to the group that, in the boy's best interest, he needed to be removed from the family and quickly. But – surprisingly – when an appropriate solution was being sought, everywhere people were heard to say that without the agreement of the parents there was simply no way that this could happen. The police, the public prosecutor, the CPD – none had sufficient power to intervene without delay.

At this point, the facilitator put a question to a room full of people with extensive administrative experience, was the following:

“According to you, would the problem with removing the boy have been so big if this was a Roma family we were talking about?”

The spontaneous and unanimous answer was -

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“Oh, then we would have removed the child ages ago! There would have been no problem.”

PREJUDICIAL THINKING (PROACTIVE TEST)

Here I describe a method for assessing the level of prejudice within a group. It involves distributing sheets of paper featuring between 30 and 40 stick figures arranged in a variety of postures. If your intention is to reveal the impact of ethnic discrimination in Bulgaria, you would invite participants to label all the figures. Is this figure Bulgarian, Turkish or Roma? They should do this without consulting anyone else.

When they have finished labelling all the figures, you ask them to explain the motives behind the labels.

“Here are the most common ideas associated with the ethnic label “Roma”:

“This here is a Roma. He is lying down and being lazy; This one is also Roma. He is swinging and having fun and doesn’t care about anything; These two are also Roma. They are climbing up the tree and obviously want to steal something. This one is a Roma - he is sitting on the end of the branch and is only watching from the side, without taking part.”

This test clearly shows the generalized picture which the Bulgarians have of the Roma. These beliefs affect professional communication with representatives of the Roma ethnic group. Prejudice entails judging on the basis of preconceptions before you have acquired real knowledge of a person and gained genuine insight into the actual circumstances of their life. We have no actual information but we already formulate an opinion that can impact on how we actually interpret the meaning of information that we do receive. We think we know this person because all Roma comply with the stereotype.

The ethnic prejudices between the Bulgarians and the Roma have their paradoxes. When you are among Bulgarians, you may overhear the suggestion that the Roma have seven-eight children each and that is why they don’t care about their children and actually don’t love them very much. The Roma, on the other hand, have another concept on the issue. You may hear Roma people saying that the Bulgarians don’t like children and that is why they give birth to one or two children and don’t want any more. Such is the “logic” of prejudicial thinking!

WORK WITH SOME DIPLOMACY

Of course prejudicial thinking isn’t a characteristic only of the Bulgarians and the Bulgarian administration. It is normal for prejudice to be met with prejudice. Roma frequently mistrust towards representatives of the government institutions. This is why working with Roma is complicated and it requires diplomacy and a flexible approach.

Here we give an example of such work, accomplished by the cooperation of many participants of the RCMD – Targovishte. The case was presented by Ivelina Deneva-Racheva, the HHC coordinator and Kalinka Ilieva – social worker from the Child Protection Department in Targovishte, is working on the case.

“Sometimes working with the Roma is so complicated, that the problems seem unsolvable. We are met by widespread illiteracy and mistrust towards the institutions. It is common for the Roma who live in ghettos to abide by internal rules of the community and the authority of community elders. The Roma family model and style of parenting is quite different from the Bulgarian one and this can create difficulties in solving specific cases.

We worked on a case of a poor Roma family that was being monitored by the CPD. There were two children in the family – one aged eight months, the other aged two years. The family was in a terrible material situation and received social support from the government as well as support from HHC. However, during every visit, we noted our feelings that the children weren’t being given the necessary care. We would find them left barefoot in the cold and the mother inside sleeping or drinking her coffee. The mother had acquired the habit of not doing anything herself, but instead phoning the HHC coordinator for even the most insignificant reasons and demanding: “Pay my phone voucher, come and drive my children to the doctor (despite the fact that she lived two hundred metres from the surgery) and so on. The children weren’t gaining weight normally and were falling behind in their development. For this reason the case was examined by the RCMD.

It was decided that the opportunities for field work had been exhausted and a there was a real risk for the health and life of the children. As a necessary precaution, it was decided for the mother and children to leave their home and to be accommodated temporarily in a MBU (Mother and Baby Unit). The other aim was to provide training in caring for young children.

This decision of the RCMD was met with great resistance. Often in the Roma quarter, when they hear about a CPD visit, the people are ready and defensive and decide that people are coming to take their children.

It turned out that the one with greatest authority in the family was the grandfather. The parents obeyed him without hesitation. He was also set against this decision of the RCMD. His words literally were: “If I was born here and have survived, then my grandchildren will also live here and will not go anywhere.”

We felt that we were in an unsolvable situation. The children really weren’t developing well. And the parents and grandfather were becoming increasingly aggressive.

We then turned to a mediator from the community, who was being trained by another nongovernmental organization that was working on a project for Roma leaders. This man turned out to have enough authority to convince the family that the accommodation in the MBU was a temporary measure and that it would be good for the children and the whole family.”

A CURIOUS CASE OF BALANCE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

The case described below is an interesting illustration of how the Law of Balance and Law of Belonging can have an effect across generations. It was shared by a participant in a group that was being trained in the method of family constellations, in which the author was in the support team of the facilitator and regularly visited the group. Here is the participant's story:

"While I was listening to the words of Bert Hellinger and the balance between generations and the right of belonging I was reminded of something personal which illustrates these principles. Some time ago, when I was at my village, I asked my mother: "Mother, why aren't there any gypsies in our village. In all the neighbouring villages gypsies have settled to live, but there are none in our village."

To which she answered:

"Because, many years ago, when your grandfather used to be mayor of the village, he chased them away. And since then no gypsy family has ever stayed in the village."

Now when I have come to know about the effect of the Law of Balance between generations, I come to realize that I have a strange affinity towards gypsies. In the place where I bought a house my neighbours are gypsies. I have much close contact with gypsies and like to communicate with them. My mother is the same. As an agronomist in one of the neighbouring villages she has constantly worked and interacted with gypsies and has many close relationships with them.

That is – my mother and I are renewing the right of belonging of people, towards whom a member of our family from a previous generation has been unjust and had literally excluded from a community!"

APPENDIX

BERT HELLINGER CONSTELLATION WITH AN SOS-MOTHER

SOS-mother: I work as an SOS-mother. And I would like us to make a constellation of my current family in the village.

Bert Hellinger: Ok. Look at me while telling the story.

SOS-mum: The thing is... some children of my family have grown up and left, and new ones have come in their place. After all this, it's as if the family has fallen apart. The older children don't accept the new ones. They are all in some kind of a fever. My family is filled with tension. The system simply isn't working.

B.H. Ok, I understand. I know where the problem is. Now I will make a constellation with you. But in a different way than the way you were thinking. How many children do you have at the moment in your family?

SOS-m: Six.

B.H. (stands up and counts six women from the group) Stand side by side in a row. You are the mothers of these children. (To the SOS-mother) And you stand opposite them.

(The SOS-mother stands close opposite the children's mothers. Some of them start to turn their backs on her immediately and walk away. Hellinger stops this process and tells the mothers to stand in line and he moves the SOS-mother a little further away)

B.H.: Look at them and bow to them.

(The SOS-mother bows quickly by falling to the floor on her knees)

B.H.: (pulling her up) No, not like that. Slowly! Look at every one of them separately. Give every one of them a place in your heart. And then slowly, with respect, bow to them.

(The SOS-mother bows to each mother separately and slowly. This process takes several minutes. The mothers are very excited. Some of them shed tears.)

B.H.:(After the SOS-mother has bowed to each of the mothers separately) Now move close to them. (To the mothers) And you stand in a circle around her. A close circle. And let every one of you place your hand on her.

B.H.: (after 2-3 minutes) Ok. Thanks to all of you. Come out of your roles. And you come beside me again. (to the SOS-mother) How do you feel now?

SOS-mum.: I am sad. And I feel some kind of emptiness.

B.H.: Do you have children of your own?

SOS-mum.: No.

B.H.: (after a pause) Close your eyes... Imagine these mothers before you and tell them: I leave them to you. These are your children.

SOS-mum.: I leave them to you. These are your children.

B.H.: I help them on your behalf.

SOS-mum.: I help them on your behalf.

B.H.: You all have a place in my heart.

SOS-mum.: You all have a place in my heart.

B.H.: (to the group) Imagine her new position. If the mothers and fathers of these children also have a place in her heart, how would the children treat her if she returned to them again? They will love her.

B.H.: (to the SOS-mother) Can you imagine it?

SOS-mum.: (touched and nodding in agreement) Yes.

B.H.: And your great work that you are doing will become easier.

(The SOS-mother keeps standing beside Hellinger with her eyes closed and looks absolutely calm)

B.H.: (to the group) Look how calm she is now. She is fully connected with the children. And on this occasion I wish to tell you something about good help. All children love their parents irrespective of the type of parents these people may be. And if the person who is helping these children respects their real parents, the children feel safe. And they love the person who is caring for them. He or she has an inner connection with their parents. If the children wanted, they could go to their parents at any moment. (To the SOS-mother). Some time ago, I was myself working at a center where there were many SOS-mothers and children. One SOS-mother told before the group the story of how there was a girl with her, who had been left at the village some time ago, but now the mother wanted to take her back. But this mother didn't have good intentions. We made a constellation. We placed the SOS-mother, the girl and the girl's mother in the constellation. The girl could discover from which direction the pull was stronger. And really – it was as if the girl's soul split into two. First she went towards her mother, then towards the SOS-mother, and didn't know in which direction she felt calmer and more confident. What do you think – where did the girl go in the end?

SOS-mum.: Probably to its mother?

B.H.: No, she went to the mother from the children's village. Sometimes the mother from the children's village is a better mother for the child than its birth mother. Do you agree?

SOS-mum.: Yes!

A BERT HELLINGER CONSTELLATION WITH A BOY FROM A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

"Kevin is aged 16 and has been living for the past 5 years on his own will in a home for children. His mother has died and the reasons for her death aren't fully known to him. His father is an Afro-American musician. Due to his living conditions he can't take on the care for his son.

Hellinger: (To Kevin who is sitting next to him) Close your eyes!

(After some time Kevin opens his eyes and smiles at Hellinger)

Hellinger: Close your eyes again. Something in you is starting to move. Let it reveal itself as it wishes. You have all the time that is necessary.

Hellinger carefully hold him by the hand. Then he gently tilts Kevin's head forward and continues holding him by the hand. After a few seconds he pulls him towards himself and hugs him with one arm. Kevin also hugs Hellinger with one

arm and leans on him. Hellinger chooses a representative of the mother and tells her to stand in front of him while he is with his eyes closed.

Hellinger: (After some time when Kevin pulls away from him slightly) This is your mother. Look at her.

Kevin looks at his mother for a long time. Then he stands up and smiles at her. The mother is very touched. After a few seconds. Hellinger asks her to draw back a little.

H: (To Kevin) Tell her: "Mother, I have everything."

K: Mother, I have everything.

H: Look at her while you say it. "Mother, I have everything"

K: Mother, I have everything.

H: "And I will benefit from this."

K: And I will benefit from this.

H: "There is nothing for you to worry about."

K: There is nothing for you to worry about.

H: "Now you may rest in peace."

K: Now you may rest in peace.

Kevin is very touched. He tilts his head on Hellinger's chest and cries.

Hellinger: (After some time) Tell her: "I miss you a lot."

K: I miss you a lot.

H: "But within me you are still alive."

K: But within me you are still alive.

H: Look at her while you speak.

H (After some time) "I will pass on what you have given to me."

K: I will pass on what you have given to me.

H: "With love."

K: With love.

Kevin nods his head. Hellinger chooses a representative of the father and places him beside the mother. Kevin looks at him for a long time.

H: This is your father. Tell him: "I give up on you forever."

Kevin waits for a long time without saying anything.

H: Tell him: "I have everything. And now I give up on you forever."

K: I have everything. And I give up on everything.

H: No, no! Tell him: "I give up on you forever."

K: I give up on you forever.

H: "But I still have everything."

K: But I still have everything.

H: "Other people helped me instead of you."

K: Other people helped me instead of you.

H: "Now I have enough strength."

K: Now I have enough strength.

Kevin looks at the representative of his father for a long while.

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H: Tell him: "Thank you for giving me life."
K: Thank you for giving me life.
H: Say it a little more pleasantly.
K: (Laughing) Thank you for giving me life.
H: "I will cope with life."
K: I will cope with life.
H: "You don't have to worry anymore."
K: You don't have to worry any more.
H: "However, I do give up on you forever."
K: However, I do give up on you forever.
H: (To Kevin) Now stand like a person who has enough strength.
Kevin widens his shoulders and stands up straight.

H: Yes, exactly. You stand up within you, that is true.
Kevin continues to stare at his parents.

Hellinger: A story is told In the Bible. A person has five talents (gold bullion) but doesn't effectively use any one of them. Another has only one talent. But he surpassed all the rest because he used his one talent with value.

Kevin nods.

H: I will tell you another story. A person was travelling in a train in a sleeping compartment. He was lying on the lower bed and above him lay another person who was staring in space in front of him and quietly moaning: "Oh, I'm so hungry! Oh, I'm so hungry!"

Then the man that was underneath went to the train buffet and brought him some food. The person ate. But after some time he again started staring into space and talking out loud: "Oh, I was so hungry! Oh, I was so hungry!"

Kevin laughs. He and Hellinger laugh, looking at each other.

H: OK?

K: That was good.

H: Then it is maybe enough. (To the representatives): Thank you.

EPILOGUE

When Kevin returned to the home, he found there a beautiful postcard from his father, addressed to him and the whole group of children. In it was written that he (the father) would try to come for the Christmas holidays and that he was very excited about it. He wished Kevin and the whole group good fortune. Furthermore, he thanked the careers for their good work.

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